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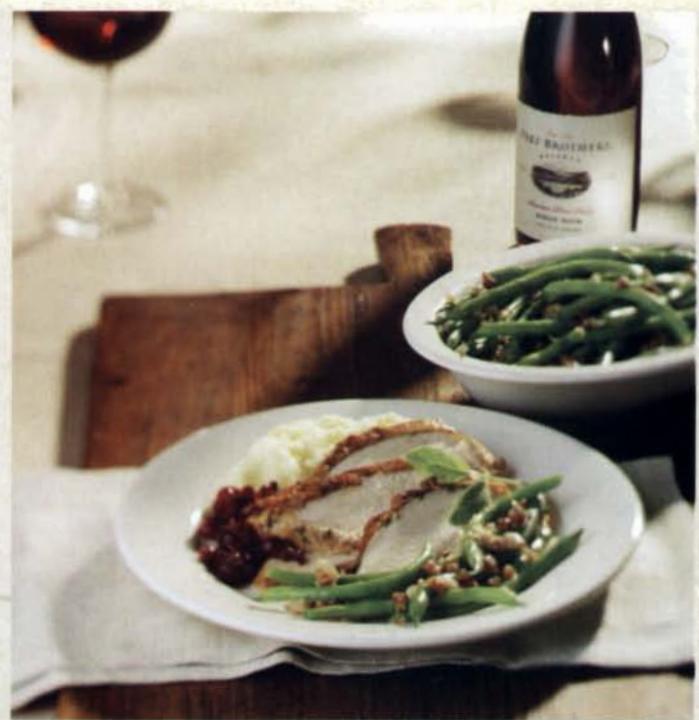
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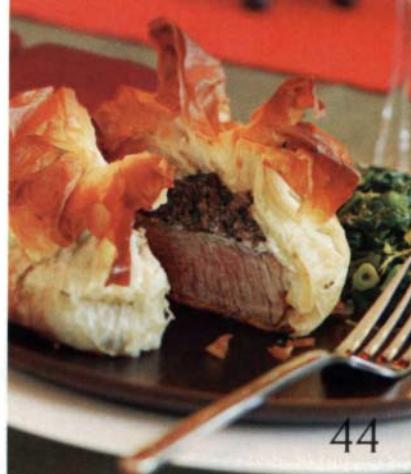
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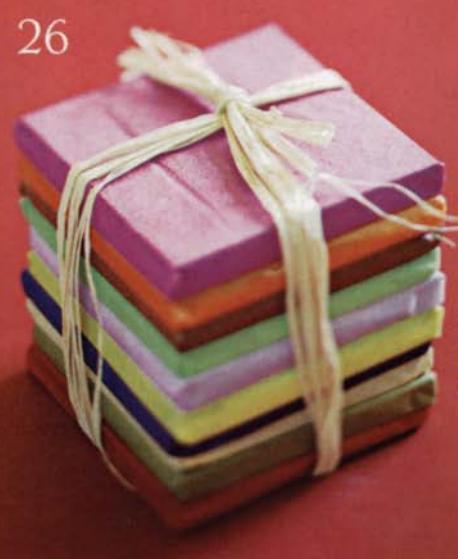
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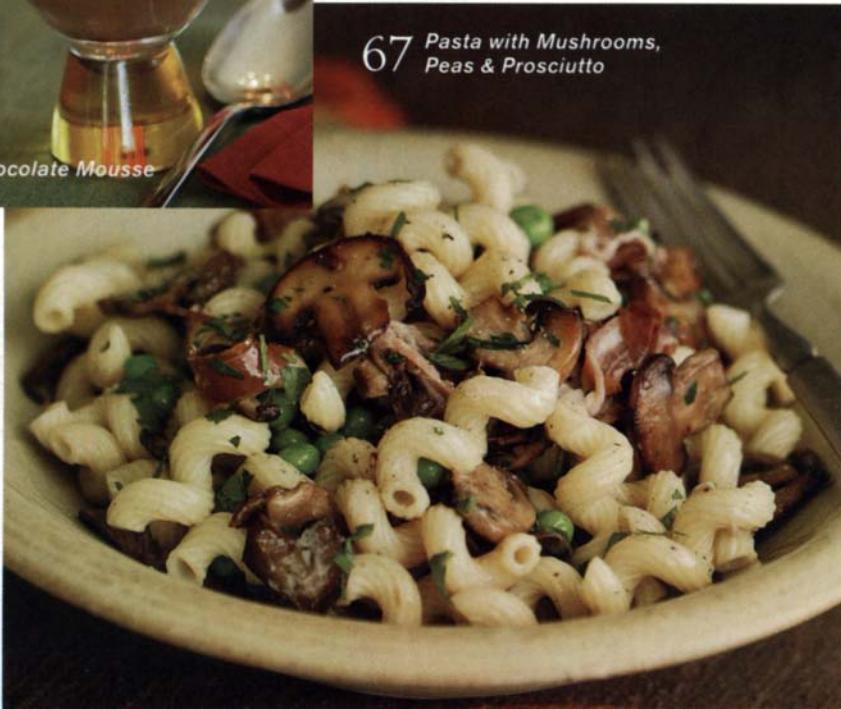
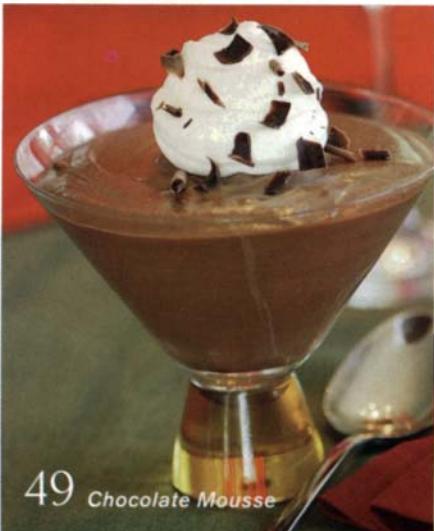


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Holiday Entertaining, Any Style

It's true that, come December, we're all looking for a holiday menu that's fun to cook and truly impressive to serve. But what about all that other entertaining we do at this time of year—those visiting in-laws, the old friends that stop by in the afternoon and stay until midnight? Seems like this is the season that you need casual menus

just as much as special ones. That's why we've filled this issue of *Fine Cooking* with recipes and ideas for any occasion—whether you're setting the table for ten or planning to pull up a few cozy chairs around the fireplace. Just remember to check the yield on each recipe, as you may need to double or halve it to suit your needs. —*the editors*

A Light Winter Brunch

- Smoked Salmon Rolls, p. 90c
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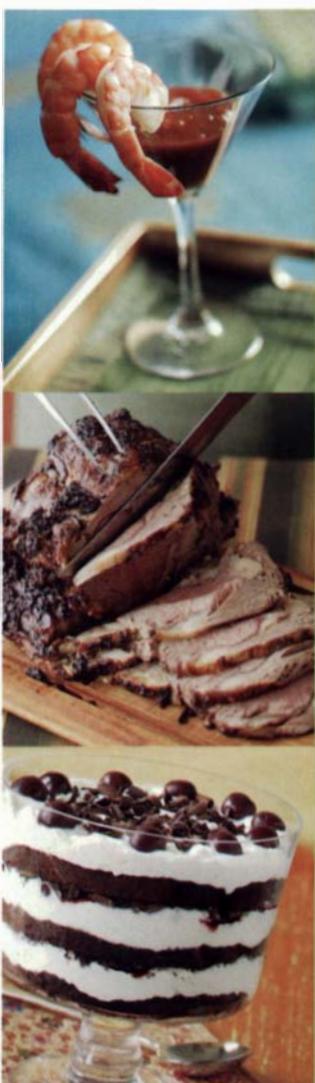
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- Roasted Potato Slices with Romesco Sauce, p. 90c

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- Arugula with Blood Oranges, Fennel & Ricotta Salata, p. 54
- Baked Penne with Tomato, Rosemary & Three Cheeses, p. 70
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Christmas Dinner

This menu is sophisticated enough for a truly special occasion like Christmas, but it isn't difficult to pull together because parts of many of these recipes can be made in advance.

If you'd liked to serve something "individual" (rather than a whole roast), consider Randall Price's beef tenderloin croustades and the entire "Dinner with Friends" menu on p. 44.

the menu

- Seared Shrimp Cocktail, p. 50
- Cocktail Sauce with Red Onion & Jalapeño, p. 50
- Dry-Aged Beef Rib Roast with a Mustard, Garlic & Thyme Crust, p. 76
- Horseradish-Chive Crème Fraîche, p. 76
- Mushroom & Potato Gratin, p. 66
- Slow-Sautéed Broccoli with Parmesan, p. 10
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wine suggestions

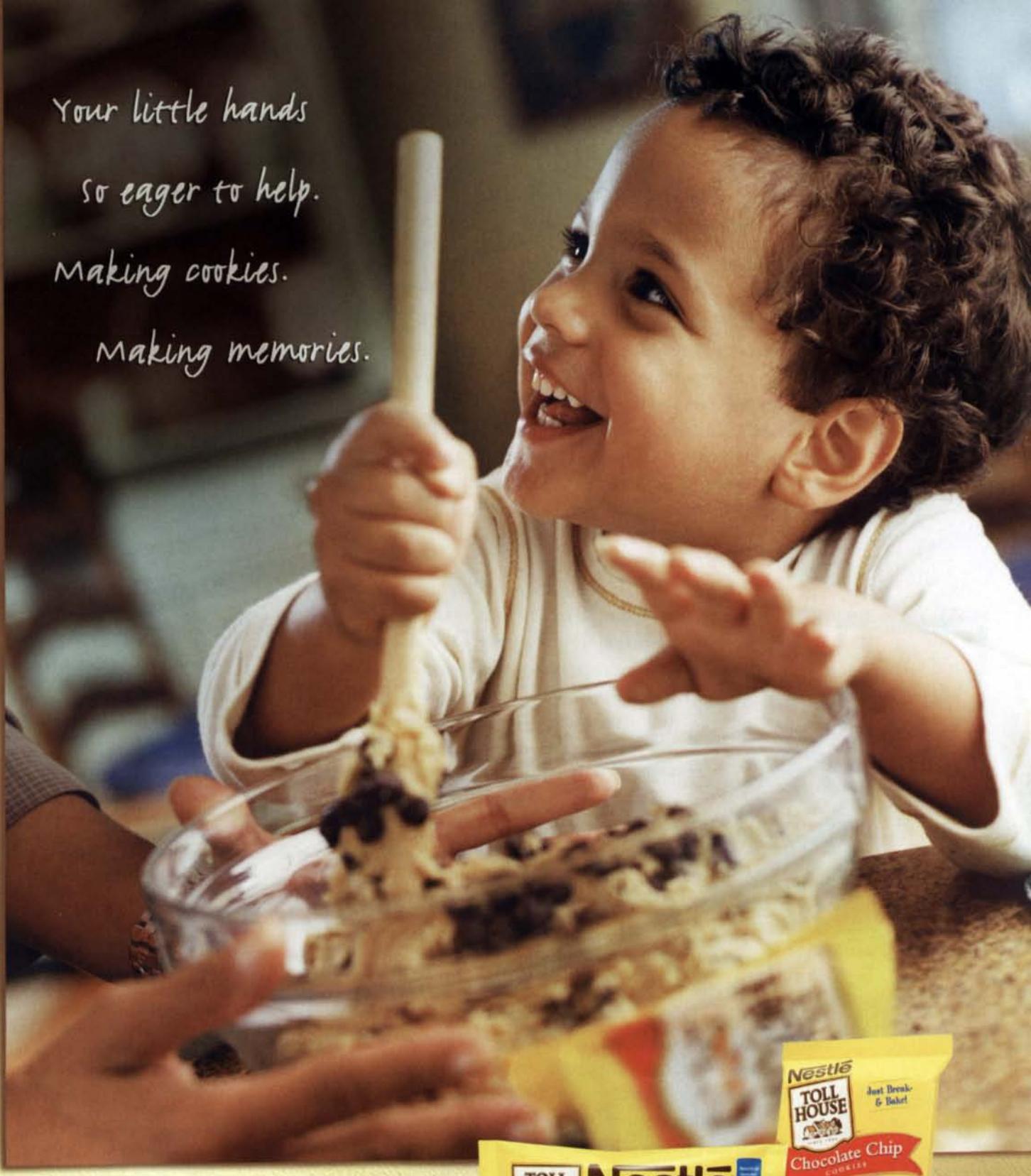
- If you have a special bottle you've been longing to uncork, aged beef roast is the perfect opportunity. Try a deeply flavored, opulent Cabernet blend or Merlot that will stand up to the garlic, mustard, and thyme crust, such as Annie's Lane Cabernet-Merlot blend from Australia (\$18) or the 2002 Frog's Leap Merlot from Napa (\$25).

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READER SERVICE NO. 97

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Celebrating all year long

I wish every year could be an anniversary year. For *Fine Cooking's* tenth, we've been celebrating nonstop since last winter.

First, we put together a collection of favorite recipes from the past ten years and included it as a special "extra" in our February issue. Then came America's Best Home Cook Contest. More than 600 of you entered the contest, and we got to meet the semi-finalists and finalists in Washington, Chicago, Seattle, and San Francisco. During the year, we also published two new special "bookazines," *Comfort Food* and *Dinner with Friends*, in addition to another edition of *Quick & Delicious*.

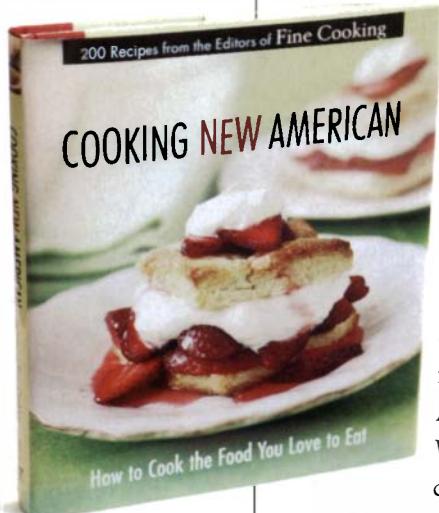
Best of all, we're winding up the year with the publication of our first cookbook, *Cooking New American*. This is a fresh, colorful look at many of our favorites, from tandoori chicken and black bean soup to spare ribs and crispy broccoli. I love the subtitle of the book—"How to cook the food you love to eat"—as this pretty much sums up what *Fine Cooking* is all about. (See p. 38 for more information.)

We're not only celebrating the publication of our own first cookbook, but also two new blockbusters from our longtime contributors Molly Stevens (*All About Braising*) and Abigail Johnson Dodge (*The Weekend Baker*). Congratulations to them both on creating such fantastic books (for more, see Book Reviews, p. 28).

Sadly, we had to say goodbye to one of our favorite authors this year. Leslie Revin—a cook and a friend we admired for her exuberant spirit and her steadfast integrity—lost her battle with cancer. Leslie wrote so many popular stories for us that we wanted to honor her memory by reprinting one of her delicious recipes (at right).

Our anniversary may be over, but the fun won't stop. We already have some exciting plans for next year. But for now, enjoy the issue you hold in your hands, whether you're cooking on a Wednesday night or for New Year's Eve. And here's to many more great issues!

—Susie Middleton, editor



Leslie Revin's Slow-Sautéed Broccoli with Parmesan

Serves four.

Coaxing the ultimate flavor from broccoli requires very little: a big, fresh, bright bunch of the same, some fruity olive oil, a few spoonfuls of grated Parmesan, and a leisurely bit of time on the range. You could also use cauliflower or a combination of the two.

6 tablespoons olive oil, preferably fruity and full flavored

1½ large heads of broccoli (1¾ pounds total), cut into 1½ - to 2-inch florets to yield 6½ cups (discard the thicker parts of the stems or save for another use)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 tablespoons freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano

Heat the oil in a heavy 9- to 10-inch skillet over medium heat. When the oil is hot, add the broccoli and sauté, stirring frequently, until it turns bright green, about 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and reduce the heat to low or medium low so you hear a steady low to medium sizzle.

Cook the broccoli, stirring occasionally, for about 20 minutes, lowering the heat at any point if it gets too brown (a crackling sound indicates the heat is too high and that the broccoli may start to burn). Reduce the heat to low or very low and continue cooking until the broccoli is unevenly browned and tender but not mushy, another 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer the broccoli to a warm serving bowl, toss with the grated cheese, taste for salt and pepper, and serve.

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from our readers

Tomatoes: roasted...

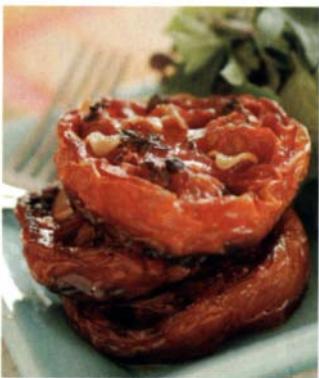
The fabulous recipe for roasted tomatoes (*Fine Cooking* #66, p. 60) was so perfectly timed for the abundance we were harvesting from our garden. I cooked up two sheet pans of plum tomatoes and "wowed" friends at a party who devoured them on the spot.

I've since been roasting up batches weekly and found they have a long refrigerated shelf life, great versatility, and, with skins removed, enhance the richness of my homemade sauce and salsas. Thanks for a superb recipe that everyone wants me to share!

—Laura Garrett,
Sterling, Virginia

...or toasted?

I tried the roasted tomato recipe in *Fine Cooking* #66,



and I am certain that the temperature of 350°F is way too high to accomplish what it is that you are recommending. Should the temperature be 250°F instead?

—Valeria Curry,
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Our new online Shopping Guide: www.finecooking.com/shopping

Shopping with *Fine Cooking's* advertisers just got easier. *Fine Cooking* only accepts advertising from cooking-related companies, so when you put it all together as we have at www.finecooking.com/shopping, it makes quite a nice "directory" of culinary products and services. We've organized the listings by category, so it's easy to browse around and see what looks intriguing. Each entry has a link to take you instantly to the company web site...very handy for online holiday shopping. And during the months of November and December, you can enter to win some pretty cool prizes.

The editors reply: We received lots of letters raving—and a few ranting—about the roasted tomato recipe in *Fine Cooking* #66. We retested the recipe with two batches of ripe beefsteak tomatoes. At 350°F, our tomatoes roasted nicely in a little over three hours. Despite this success, we've identified a few variables that could account for disappointing results. Here are some pointers:

- ❖ Use heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet. Thin pans could cause burning.
- ❖ Pack the sheet pan full of tomatoes. If the pan isn't full, expect the tomatoes to cook more quickly.
- ❖ Choose tomatoes that are about equal in size so that they cook at the same rate; smaller tomatoes and plum tomatoes (as well as seeded tomatoes) will cook faster.
- ❖ Use an oven thermometer to double-check your oven's calibration.

❖ Check the tomatoes frequently. If they're browning too quickly, reduce the oven temperature or remove the tomatoes. But don't under-cook them—let them get deep brown and collapse to half their original height for the best flavor.

All that said, you certainly don't have to roast tomatoes at 350°F. This temperature really does produce caramelized juices that offer big flavor, but you can get delicious roasted tomatoes at lower temperatures too—you'll just need more time.

Beware when brining: salty gravy

What no one ever says when talking about the wonders of brining (From Our Test Kitchen, *Fine Cooking* #67), is that the turkey juices (which I love to use to make gravy) are so salty as to be totally useless. It's probably a no-brainer, but I didn't think of it until I was actually confronted with it. I think people ought to be made aware of this fact when being told of the "wonders" of brining.

—Sylvia Spasoff,
Edwards, Ontario

The editors reply: You're right that the juices from a brined turkey are quite salty, but they aren't totally useless. You can still use them, along with the drippings (or cooked-on juices) in gravy if you think of them less like broth and more like a strong seasoning—like soy sauce—where a little goes a long way. By using this approach, we were able to include some of the drippings in the por-

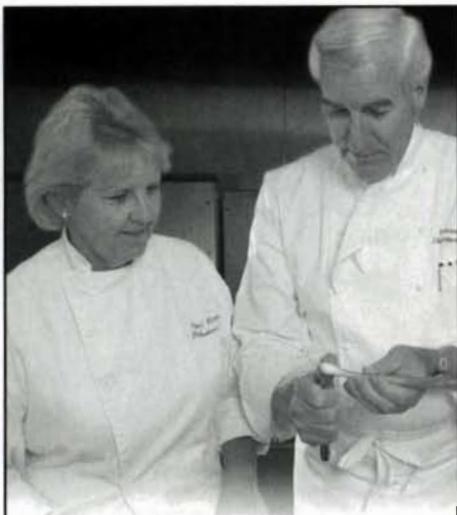
cini mushroom gravy that accompanied our brined turkey in *Fine Cooking* #67 (pp. 75-76): We poured off the liquid drippings and fat from the roasting pan and used some of that fat along with flour and the flavorful drippings that had cooked on to the bottom of the roasting pan to make the roux for the gravy. For liquid, we used a homemade, very lightly salted turkey broth in combination with dried porcini soaking water. The gravy had a dark, roasty color and plenty of rich turkey flavor without being too salty. In fact, we actually had to add a little extra salt—which could take the form of the turkey juices—to finish the gravy.

Keep picturing a novice like me...

I have really enjoyed your publication. Over the last two years I have literally taught myself how to cook from reading *Fine Cooking*. My friends and family now ask to come to dinner and in fact are offering to bring me fine cuts of meat to prepare for them! I have become an adventurous vegetable hunter—I wander the aisles at the grocery store asking questions and pursuing seasonal fare.

The key to your magazine is that you teach how to cook, not just giving recipes and leaving the details unsaid. Thank you for this effort. Please always err on the side of giving more detailed instructions; picture a novice like me trying to understand and learn.

—David D. Reimer,
Toronto, Ontario ♦



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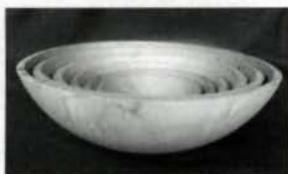
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READER SERVICE NO. 8

Contributors



Rori Trovato



Jennifer Martinkus and Derrin Davis



Elinor Klivans

Randall Price ("Holiday Menu," p. 44) was working as a chef in Ohio years ago when he entered a recipe contest, won a pastry course at La Varenne in Paris, and from there launched a career in Europe as a caterer, chef, and teacher, including several years as chef to the Austrian and Australian ambassadors to France, and as chef at the Café de Mars in Paris. These days, Randall is Resident Chef at La Varenne's Château du Fey and cooks for private clients in Paris and the Auvergne.

Author and food stylist Rori Trovato ("Shrimp Cocktail," p. 50) has been developing recipes for leading food magazines for several years. Her experience as a chef and her talent for making food beautiful inspired her to write *Dishing With Style*. The book features Rori's delicious food and inventive ideas for presenting it. Rori teaches cooking in Provence in summer and lives in Santa Barbara, California, with her husband, photographer Luca Trovato.

For Maria Helm Sinskey ("Winter Salads," p. 52), well-constructed salads are perfect building blocks for an elegant entertaining menu. "I like to present my salads in a large bowl, so that my guests can appreciate their full beauty," she says, "but if your dining affair is formal, all of these salad recipes are suitable and beautiful enough to be plated individually and served." Maria is the former chef of San Francisco's PlumpJack Café and the author of *In the Vineyard Kitchen: Menus Inspired By The Seasons*. She now oversees the culinary programs at Napa Valley's Robert Sinskey Vineyards, which she owns with her husband.

Elinor Klivans ("Black Forest Trifle," p. 57), who lives in Camden, Maine, knows that comforting desserts make her holiday season much cozier. "It takes a lot of trifle to get through those long Maine winters," she says. Elinor is a food writer and cookbook author whose next books, *Big Fat Cookies* and *Cupcakes* will be published in late 2004 and early 2005.

Jennifer Martinkus and Derrin Davis ("Stuffed Chicken Breasts," p. 60) are a brother-sister food writing team in the Pacific Northwest. Jennifer worked as a caterer and private cook before becoming the food editor for *Delicious Living*. She's now a freelance food writer in Yakima, Washington. Her brother, Derrin Davis, graduated from Johnson & Wales University and worked his way toward his dream job at Bay House restaurant in Lincoln City, on the Oregon coast.

As a chef at The Herbfarm restaurant near Seattle, Lynne Sampson ("Mushroom Sauté," p. 64) learned how to handle and cook wild mushrooms—a skill she applies to preparing store-bought mushrooms as well. Lynne is a food writer, editor, and recipe tester. Drawing on her professional cooking experiences in New York, Paris, Florence, and the Mexican highlands, she teaches cooking classes from her home in eastern Oregon's Wallowa Mountains.

Fine Cooking contributing editor Tony Rosenfeld learned to make baked pasta (p. 68) in Italy, where he picked up many techniques that he currently applies to his work as a food writer and restaurant consultant. Tony recently helped create and develop the menu for "b.good," a new healthy fast-food restaurant in Boston.

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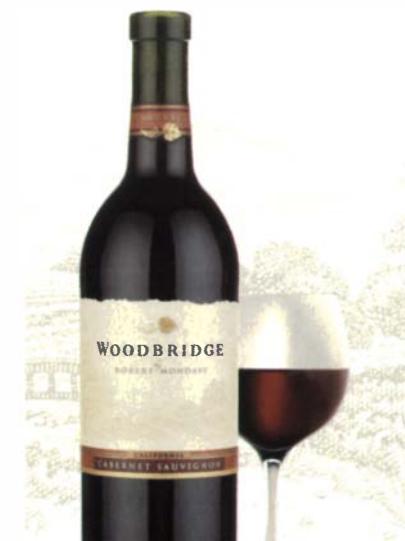
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Sweet, Juicy Oranges Taste Best in Winter

BY RUTH LIVELY

During winter, oranges—like other citrus fruits—are at their sweetest and juiciest, so it's a great time to take advantage of the many varieties. The sweet orange family includes common or blond oranges (like Valencias); navels (with thick skin and an embryonic fruit within the fruit); and blood oranges (with stunning garnet-red flesh). Then there are all the relatives: mandarins, distinguished by loose, easy-to-peel skin and flowery flavor (tangerines are a type of mandarin); temple oranges and clementines (crosses between oranges and mandarins); and tangelos (hybrids of mandarins, oranges, and grapefruit).

Keeping track of what's what in the orange family can be perplexing. Here's what you need to know as a cook. Valencias are good all-purpose oranges because they're juicy, they have good flavor, and their rind, flesh, and juice of have a nice, deep color. Blood oranges contribute an exotic look to salads or other dishes. They're less acidic than navels and Valencias, which can make them seem sweeter. The flesh and juice of navels are delicious but can turn bitter when exposed to air, so these are best eaten out of hand or served soon after peeling. Fruits labeled as "juice oranges" produce copious amounts of juice and have flavorful zest, but they're often seedy, pulpy, and messy when sliced.

Oranges really give their all in the kitchen. Every part of the fruit is usable—the flesh, the juice, and the aromatic skin. Only the spongy white pith between the skin and the flesh is a throwaway because of its bitterness. For a light, refreshing dessert that showcases all parts of the fruit, try the recipe for Fresh Oranges with Caramel & Ginger on p. 20. It's a sophisticated idea that's deceptively simple to pull off.

3 tools to remove the zest

Orange zest adds a floral, citrusy accent to dishes. Depending on what I'm cooking, I choose one of three tools to remove the zest. Remember that the orange outer layer of peel is what you're after; avoid cutting into the bitter white pith directly underneath.



GRATER Forget the box grater. A rasp-style grater like a Microplane gives feathery, moist threads (and no pith), perfect for cakes, sauces, or any recipe that calls for grated zest.



PEELER To infuse into custards, syrups, or broths, use a vegetable peeler to cut wide sections of skin. Trim away the white pith by laying the strips flat and holding a sharp knife at a nearly flat angle. For very fine julienne zest, slice the piece into thin strips.



ZESTER A citrus zester has five small holes for peeling thin shreds of zest, which can be used much the same as grated zest. A channel knife has a single, larger hole, which produces thicker strips that are ideal for garnishes. Some tools include both of these cutting options in one, as in the photo at left.

(In Season continues on p. 20)

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Fresh Oranges with Caramel & Ginger

Serves four to six.

If you serve this pretty dessert soon after assembling it, you'll get bits of crunchy caramel with the orange slices. If you let it sit for a couple of hours, the caramel will dissolve and blend with the orange juices to make a toasty syrup. Both ways are very appealing.

5 seedless oranges, such as navel, including some blood oranges if possible

2 tablespoons chopped crystallized ginger

1/3 cup granulated sugar

8 to 10 mint leaves, very thinly sliced

Finely grate the zest (use a rasp-style grater if you have one) from one of the oranges to get 2 teaspoons zest. Cut the tops and bottoms off of each orange, being sure to cut into some of the flesh; reserve the tops and bottoms. Cut the peel off the sides, exposing the flesh by cutting under the pithy membrane. Discard

the peels cut from the sides. Cut each orange in half vertically, trim out the pithy core, and then slice each piece crosswise into 1/4-inch half moons. Arrange the slices on a large, shallow serving dish or deep platter.

Combine the zest and crystallized ginger on a cutting board and chop them together until they're well mixed. Scatter the ginger and zest evenly over the oranges.

Put 2 tablespoons water in a small, heavy saucepan and pour the sugar on top. Bring to a boil over high heat, lower the heat to medium high, and boil without stirring until the syrup has turned a deep medium brown, 5 to 8 minutes. Watch the pan carefully during the last few minutes, as the caramel goes quickly from brown to burnt. Using a heavy pot holder to hold the pan, immediately drizzle the caramel over the oranges, getting a bit of caramel on each slice. Scatter the mint over the oranges. Squeeze the juice from the reserved ends of the oranges over all.

Punch up soups and sauces with juice

❖ Orange juice and zest are dynamite additions to tomato soup, carrot soup, roasted red pepper soup, or pumpkin soup.

❖ Make a beautiful sauce for asparagus by softening chopped shallots in butter, adding fresh orange juice and a pinch of saffron, and reducing by half.

❖ For a simple fish soup, simmer fish broth with orange juice and zest, saffron, garlic, and fennel fronds. Add shrimp, scallops, and white fish to finish.

❖ Make a sweet-sour cranberry sauce using equal parts water and orange juice for the cooking liquid.

❖ Make a marinade for grilled or roasted pork with orange juice, rosemary, garlic, and red chile flakes.

❖ Marinate cooked beets in a sweet-tangy dressing of reduced orange juice, honey, and grated zest.

Add zip to desserts with zest

❖ Grated orange zest and ground coriander give an intriguing scent to butter cookies, shortcakes, pound cake, scones, or biscuits.

❖ For a twist on pineapple upside-down cake, substitute orange slices and season the batter with grated orange zest and fresh ginger.

❖ Grated zest adds zip to crème fraîche, whipped cream, brownies, ginger cookies, and chocolate-chip cookies.

❖ Add a sophisticated touch to homemade dark chocolate ice cream with grated orange zest. Stir the zest into the hot custard before freezing.

❖ Fold orange zest into macerated berries for shortcake or into fruit destined for pies and tarts.

Make pretty salads with slices

❖ Compose a winter salad with orange slices, shredded cabbage, and avocado slices; drizzle on a vinaigrette made with orange and lemon juice and honey.

❖ Toss thin slices of orange with fennel or jicama and red onion, and season with lemon juice, olive oil, and a dash of cayenne.

❖ Toss bitter greens (radicchio, arugula, watercress, or endive) and orange slices with a sherry vinaigrette and garnish with toasted almonds.

Ruth Lively cooks, gardens, and writes in New Haven, Connecticut. ♦



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Strawberry Lemon Frost Shakes



1 jar Dickinson's® Pure Seedless Pacific Mountain® Strawberry Preserves
3/4 jar Dickinson's® Lemon Curd

1 c. Plain Yogurt
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4 Ice Cubes
Optional: Strawberries, fresh or frozen
Combine all ingredients in a blender container
and process until frothy. Divide into two
stemmed glasses and garnish with strawberries.
Makes 2 servings.

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Citrus Chicken with Raspberry Sauce



Marinade:
1 jar Dickinson's® Lemon or Lime Curd
8 oz. Plain Yogurt
3 Tbsp. Cilantro, chopped
1 sm. Jalapeno Pepper, seeded & chopped
1 tsp. Salt
6 Chicken Breast Halves, skinless, boneless

In a medium bowl combine Curd, yogurt, cilantro, jalapeno and salt; blend well. Marinate chicken for 4 hrs. or overnight. Discard marinade. Grill chicken until it is no longer pink. Stir together Preserves and lime juice and drizzle over chicken. Serve immediately. Makes 6 servings.

Sauce:
1 jar Dickinson's® Pure Seedless Cascade
Mountain™ Red Raspberry Preserves
2 Tbsp. Lime Juice



Raspberry Lemon Trifle



1 jar Dickinson's® Pure Seedless Cascade

Mountain™ Red Raspberry Preserves
1 jar Dickinson's® Lemon Curd
1 lg. box Instant Vanilla Pudding Mix

1 10"-rd. Angel Food Cake
1 8-oz. container Whipped Topping
Optional: Raspberries, fresh or frozen
1 c. Milk
Tear cake into small pieces, set aside. Mix pudding & milk, then fold in Curd; set aside. Put a layer of cake pieces (about 1/3) on the bottom of a trifle dish or deep glass dish. Stir Preserves with a spoon to soften, then spoon 1/3 on top of the 1st cake layer, then top with 1/3 of the Curd mixture & 1/3 whipped topping. Repeat, layering until all of the cake is used up. Refrigerate for 2 hrs. Garnish with optional raspberries. Makes 10-12 servings.



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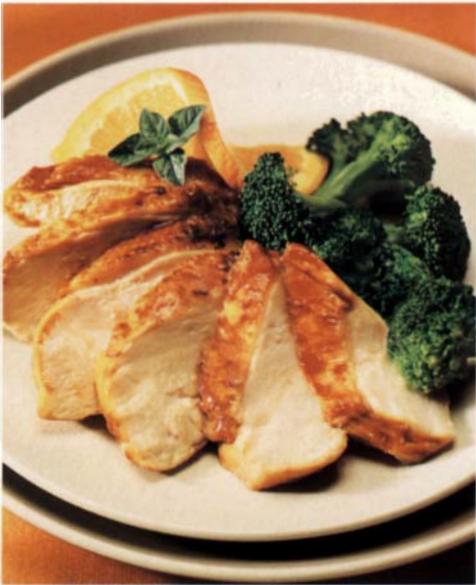
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Makes 4 servings.

2/3 cup Kikkoman Soy Sauce
1/4 cup orange juice
2 tablespoons lime juice
2 large cloves garlic, pressed
4 boneless chicken breast halves

Combine soy sauce, orange and lime juices and garlic. Pour mixture over chicken in large plastic food storage bag. Press air out of bag; close top securely. Turn bag over several times to coat chicken. Marinate 20 minutes, turning bag over once. Remove chicken from marinade; discard marinade. Broil chicken, skin side down, 5 inches from heat source 8 minutes. Turn over; cook 6 minutes longer, or until chicken is no longer pink in center.

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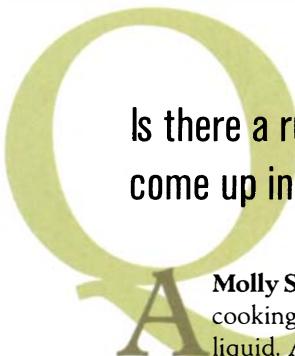
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SAVORY ROASTED PEPPERS

Makes 4 servings.

2 large red bell peppers, seeded and cut into eighths
1 large yellow bell pepper, seeded and cut into eighths
3 tablespoons Kikkoman Lite Soy Sauce
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh oregano leaves
1 large clove garlic, pressed
1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese

Arrange peppers, skin side up, in single layer on rack of broiler pan. Broil 6 to 8 minutes, or until skin is blackened. Turn peppers over; cook 5 minutes longer. Remove from broiler; let stand on rack 5 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk together lite soy sauce, vinegar, oil, oregano and garlic in medium bowl. Remove skin from peppers. Add peppers to soy sauce mixture, stirring to coat well. Marinate 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. To serve, arrange peppers on serving plate; sprinkle cheese over peppers.



Is there a rule about how high the liquid should come up in a braise?

—Kevin McCabe, via email

A **Molly Stevens replies:** By definition, braising means gently cooking ingredients in a covered pot in a small amount of liquid. As a general rule, the liquid should come less than one-third of the way up the sides of the main ingredient. This may look like a scant amount, but all foods release liquid as they braise and thereby increase the amount of liquid in the pot. The goal is to have just enough to create a moist environment in which the liquid evaporates and then condenses on the underside of the lid and falls back into the pot to baste the food. This way, the main ingredient becomes irresistibly tender, and the braising liquid transforms into a concentrated, flavorful sauce. Adding too much liquid to start will result in a diluted sauce that lacks flavor and body. One word of caution with long braises (anything over 3 hours): If the liquid threatens to dry up after a couple of hours, add a bit more.

The one exception to this rule is a hybrid technique used by many chefs in which they braise uncovered. In this case, you'll need enough liquid to just barely cover the main ingredient to account for the evaporation that happens without a tightly sealed pot.

Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of All About Braising: The Art of Uncomplicated Cooking.

Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by email to fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

I have trouble judging a cake's doneness. Is there a way to check this with an instant-read thermometer?

—Dana Jetters, Concord, California

A **Nicole Rees replies:** Yes. Like bread, you can actually check a cake for doneness by using an instant-read thermometer. Breads should reach an internal temperature of about 200°F. Cakes, however, are considered done at about 210°F. The higher proportion of sugar and liquid in cake recipes raises the temperature at which the structure of the cake is set.

That said, checking for doneness with a thermometer isn't necessarily the best use of science in the kitchen. Here's why. First, not all cakes take kindly to being poked, especially with a thermometer that needs to

be inserted halfway into the center of the cake. For example, the tender structure of sponge cakes (génoise, angel food, chiffon) is more dependent upon egg proteins than other cakes, and egg proteins are unique in that they are flexible even when fully cooked. Thus, these types of cakes are prone to collapse until they're fully cooled.

Other cakes, such as basic layer cakes, pound cakes, and bundt cakes, can withstand the prodding of an instant-read thermometer without collapsing. For these types of cakes, however, I prefer to test for doneness by inserting a wooden skewer in the center of the cake. Metal skewers or the tip of a knife just aren't as effective: The still-wet batter can slip smoothly off the metal.

Nicole Rees co-wrote The Baker's Manual and Understanding Baking.

My honing steel doesn't work as well as it used to. Do I need to replace it?

—Matt Soban, via email

A **Norman Weinstein replies:** A honing steel restores a knife's bite by straightening the microscopic "teeth" at the edge that fold with use. A steel can be used on a straight-edged knife with practically every use or whenever you feel that knife's "bite" is gone. Over time, however, repeated use will degrade the grooves of a honing steel, making it virtually useless. To test, run your thumbnail around the circumference of the tool. If you can feel the grooves, your steel still has some life in it.

Honing steels are magnetized and pick up the microscopic filings that come off the blade. Run a soft cloth up the steel after each use to keep the grooves from getting clogged. If you hone a knife with food particles on it, wash the steel with a soft, soapy cloth and rinse and dry it thoroughly. If a knife doesn't respond to honing, it's likely time to have that culprit sharpened.

Norman Weinstein, CCP, is the knife skills instructor at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City.

What is ice wine?

—Rebecca White, via email

A **Tim Gaier replies:** Ice wine is a distinctive dessert wine that gets its name from being made from partially frozen late-harvest grapes. The very best ice wines come from Germany, with delicious ones also made in Canada, Austria, and Michigan. Ice wines are expensive because they're risky

and labor-intensive to produce. A team of harvesters must be on call 24 hours a day to be ready for the exact moment that the grapes get cold enough to harvest but haven't yet frozen solid. The grapes are then rushed into the winery to be gently pressed, and their intensely concentrated juice is fermented.

The result can only be described as nectar, because much of the grape's water content is frozen and doesn't end up in the finished wine. Ice wine has a very high acidity—up to three times that of an ordinary table wine. But that acidity is balanced with amazing sweetness to create a remarkable result—a wine that's powerful but not cloying, with great aging potential.

Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a master sommelier.

Is it true that if you're doubling a recipe, you shouldn't necessarily double the spices?

*—Andi Carlson,
Silver Spring, Maryland*

A **Pamela Penzey replies:** Every Wednesday, we cook lunch for all of our store employees, so I can say with certainty that spices require a subtle hand when doubling recipes, or increasing them tenfold as we do. For a recipe that calls for spices per piece (e.g., 1/2 teaspoon seasoning per chicken breast), it doesn't matter whether you're cooking two breasts or 200, it will be the same 1/2 teaspoon per piece. In all other recipes, it isn't that simple.

If you're doubling a baking recipe, vanilla and cinnamon can

be doubled, although the cinnamon may start to dominate if it's strong. Other spices should be increased by one-half to two-thirds. For example, 1 teaspoon allspice for one batch would become 1 1/2 to 1 2/3 teaspoons for a double batch. Strong spices, like cloves, seem to grow stronger exponentially as they are increased.

When it comes to making big batches of soups, stews, and chilis, hold back on the spices. Their flavors will grow during long cooking, especially in the company of acidic ingredients such as wine and tomatoes. There's no turning back once you've added your seasonings, so start conservatively. I taste every dish halfway through and adjust the seasoning, and then again at the end just before serving.

Pamela Penzey is in charge of food at Penzeys Spices in Brookfield, Wisconsin.

What's the advantage to baking with superfine sugar? Is there a substitute?

—Steven Keith, via email

A **Abigail Johnson Dodge replies:** Some recipes call for superfine sugar because it dissolves faster than regular granulated. This quality makes it perfect for meringues and for desserts that don't get baked, like mousses, where you want sweetness but not a gritty texture. If your grocer doesn't stock superfine sugar (known as caster sugar in the U.K.; also called bar sugar because it dissolves quickly in drinks), it's easy to make your own. Process regular granulated sugar in a food processor until it's pulverized to a fine texture, which takes about a minute. Measure the sugar for the recipe only after processing.

Abby Dodge, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of The Weekend Baker. ♦

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New enameled cast-iron cookware

Considering giving a gift of cookware? Any cook would be thrilled with a piece from this new line from Lodge. The company, known for its high-quality cast iron, has introduced its first enameled pieces: Dutch ovens (perfect for braises) in two sizes and 2-quart oval casseroles (gratin-friendly), in vibrant green, red, and blue. *Lodge 7-quart (\$197.95) or 5-quart (\$167.95) Dutch oven; 2-quart oval casserole (\$95.95)*, at LodgeMfg.com.

A rare and special honey

Tupelo trees, indigenous to the southeastern United States, are the source of this wonderful honey, which can only be harvested during three weeks in April when the trees blossom. *Fine Cooking* tasters were impressed with the honey's complex floral and citrus notes. To appreciate the flavor, use the honey in simple preparations—serve it with tea or cornbread and butter. *Savannah Bee Company Tupelo honey (\$18 for 20 ounces)* at SavannahBee.com.



a gift for every cook

Need a present for a friend who loves to cook as much as you do? Here's something for everyone

BY REBECCA FREEDMAN



Around-the-world chocolate sampler

Give chocolate lovers this pretty sampler from French chocolatier François Pralus: it includes ten chocolates made with cocoa beans from different plantations across the globe. We love the chocolates' creamy texture and subtle flavor notes, from vanilla and fruit to spice and smoke. Each variety is also sold separately in larger bars for baking. *Pralus Pyramide du tropiques dark chocolate sampler, \$43.99* at Chefshop.com (877-337-2491).



A new profile for a wineglass

Riedel sells these handsome "O Series" glasses as everyday wine tumblers—a great idea for preventing knock-overs. But they make even better snifters, perfect for brandy or single-malt Scotch, where it's desirable to cup the glass with your palms to warm what's inside. Set of two, \$14.95 to \$19.95, at *International Wine Accessories* (iwawine.com; 800-527-4072).

—Amy Albert, senior editor



Olive oil from Australia

If you've never associated Australia with olive oil, take note: The country gets 20% more sunlight than Europe, so Australian olives produce five times more oil than European ones. What's refreshing about these oils from Dandaragan is their light, delicate, non-oily mouthfeel. They come in four flavor blends: delicate, robust, fruity, and chef's choice. *Dandaragan olive oil*, \$25.95 to \$28.95, at Ultraevoo.com.

An oil and vinegar duo

With perfect acidity and a sweetness that's never cloying, this new vinegar from O is one of our favorite holiday picks. Made from Port, it has a rich, deep flavor that makes it a great alternative to balsamic vinegar and perfect for flavorful pan sauces. For a great gift, pair it with O's pleasantly mild and well-balanced extra-virgin olive oil. *O Porto Vinegar*, \$9.99 for 6.8 ounces; *extra-virgin olive oil*, \$8 for 12 ounces, at Whole Foods markets or Oliveoil.com.



Handy spice packs

If you—or a friend—want to try new spices without buying a whole jar, you'll like Pinch Plus herb and spice packets. Each foil packet contains a tablespoon of an organic dried herb or spice and folds closed to keep contents fresh. The packets also come in booklets that make perfect stocking stuffers: Try the Christmas one, which contains thyme, rosemary, and ginger. *Pinch Plus spices*, 95 cents for single packs, \$10.50 for a pack of ten, and \$6 for booklets, at Pinchplus.com.



Chocolates with flavors a cook will love

We don't usually review chocolate that's just for eating (not for cooking) but Samaki Chocolates, from Canadian chocolatier Jennifer Davis, are so amazing that we couldn't resist. Flavors include burnt caramel orange, roasted coffee, and raspberry violet, but our favorites are the chocolate-dipped caramels sprinkled with sea salt. Trust us, the salty-sweet combination is addictive. Samakichocolates.com (403-331-2361).

A curvy wineglass for better tasting

Metrokane's new line of wineglasses has a lip that curves outward, which helps direct wine to the front of the palate for better tasting. Four sizes are available, but the glass I liked sipping from best is the 12-ounce Chablis/Chardonnay glass, a stylish and tasty way to serve a white wine apéritif. *Set of four Metrokane Chablis/Chardonnay wineglasses*, \$64.99 at Amazon.com.

—A. A.



Cookbooks with Heart

BY KIMBERLY Y. MASIBAY

With topics ranging from birthday cakes to braising, the best cookbooks of 2004 glow with their authors' love. Pick up any one of these titles and the genuine enthusiasm in the author's voice will tempt you to explore new culinary terrain: to try a new tool, taste a new ingredient, or master a new technique.

Lifelong pursuits

Part memoir, part travelogue, *The Breath of a Wok* by Grace Young and Alan Richardson (Simon & Schuster, \$35), details the fundamentals of buying, seasoning, and caring for a wok, and provides 125 appealing recipes that inspired me to clean up and reseason my rusted carbon-steel wok so that I could start stir-frying my way to *wok hay*, the "elusive, seared taste that comes only from cooking in a wok." I don't think my stove gets hot enough for me to achieve Chinese-restaurant-quality results, but everything I made was amazing nonetheless. Auntie Yi's Stir-Fried Garlic Lettuce was a crunchy, sweet, garlicky treat (and took me about two minutes to make, including prep). And Lee Wan Ching's Sizzling Pepper & Salt Shrimp hit all the right notes: spicy, crunchy, salty, sweet.

At age 15, bread-baking authority Maggie Glezer realized she needed to learn her great-grandmother's recipes or lose them forever. Years later, that same spirit of preservation spurred Glezer (who also wrote *Artisan Baking Across America*) to start baking with people from every background she could find, from Guatemala to Italy to Russia to Iraq. The result is *A Blessing of Bread: Jewish Bread Baking Around the World* (Artisan, \$35), a breathtaking collection of stories and 60 recipes. Glezer

notes every ingredient, gesture, and motion needed to make each loaf. And if my experience is any indication, her impeccably written recipes ensure success: I pulled off a beautiful braided challah and a stunning Azerbaijani Spiral Bread on my very first try.

Fans of chef Frank Stitt's food at the Highlands Bar & Grill in Birmingham may feel like they've waited a lifetime for his first book, and they won't be disappointed with *Frank Stitt's Southern Table* (Artisan, \$40). The book is a feast for the eyes, peppered with loving profiles of the people, places, and events that have influenced Stitt's unique culinary voice. But this is no coffee-table book in cookbook disguise. Stitt's Provençal-influenced Southern recipes sent me running for the kitchen to try low-country classics like pickled shrimp and herbed cottage-cheese dip, as well as restaurant-style dishes like poached egg salad with red wine sauce and sirloin strip with grilled red onions, cornbread, and salsa verde. Everything was totally doable at home and no less artful for being so.



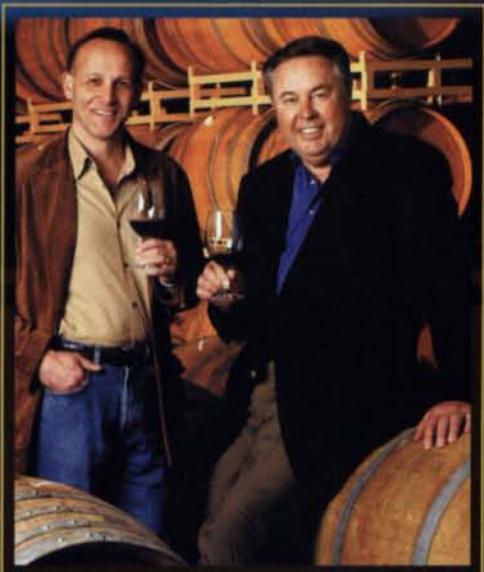
In a single weekend, I turned my copy of *Lidia's Family Table* (Knopf, \$35), by Lidia Bastianich, into a dog-eared, sauce-splattered, Post-it-ruffled mess. And what a delicious weekend it was... pasta sauces that cooked faster than the time it took to boil water, gratinéed and skillet-cooked vegetables, slow-cooked summer tomato sauce, no-cook summer tomato sauce. But this book is so much more than a collection of great-sounding recipes. Helpful sidebars, tip boxes, and process photographs make you feel as if Lidia is standing beside you at the stove. As Lidia walks you through cooking processes, you internalize fundamental ideas—"undercook the pasta slightly, trans-

(Continued on p. 30)

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READER SERVICE NO. 95

fer it to the skillet dripping wet, and finish cooking it with the sauce"—and, before long, her recipes feel like they're your very own.

If you like the idea of cooking recipes of your own design, you'll love *Cooking One on One* (Clarkson Potter, \$37.50), by John Ash. He believes the best way to become a confident, creative cook is to dive in and explore, and this unique collection of cooking lessons provides ample opportunity. Ash divides his lessons into three categories: Flavor Maker Lessons (such as salsas, pestos, marinades, sauces); Technique Lessons (soup, oven-drying, pot-roasting, soufflés, pasta); Main Ingredient Lessons (chicken, beans, mushrooms, shrimp, soy). Within each lesson, Ash provides several flawless recipes, ranging from simple to complex, to illustrate that every dish, no matter how complicated, is built on a few simple techniques. Master them and you won't need a recipe to throw together something delicious to eat.



The food we love to eat

Speaking of delicious, what ever happened to good ol' fatty pork? You'll find the answer, along with advice on making the most of today's svelte little piggies, in *Bruce Aidell's Complete Book of Pork* (Harper Collins, \$29.95). In addition to fascinating lore, pig history, and 150 recipes, Aidell offers something yummy for everyone, whether you're hankering for a juicy pork chop, the

perfect BLT, or homemade breakfast sausage. (Yes, you can make sausage at home, and who better to teach you than the founder of the Aidells Sausage Company?)

The charms of this pretty little book are hard to resist: *Birthday Cakes* (Chronicle Books, \$24.95), by Karen Kleinman, presents our best cooks' and bakers' favorite cake recipes, together in one sweet volume. There's Maida Heatter's Orange Chiffon Cake, Marion Cunningham's Heavenly Angel Cake, Alice Water's 1-2-3-4 Cake, Alice Medrich's Fastest Fudge Cake, Emily Luchetti's Grandmother's Chocolate Cake, and Flo Braker's Baby Cakes. Sweetness and happiness on every page, plus decorating tips and templates, and an elephant-shaped pattern in case you find yourself in the mood for Pink Elephant Cut-Out Cake.

From our contributing editors

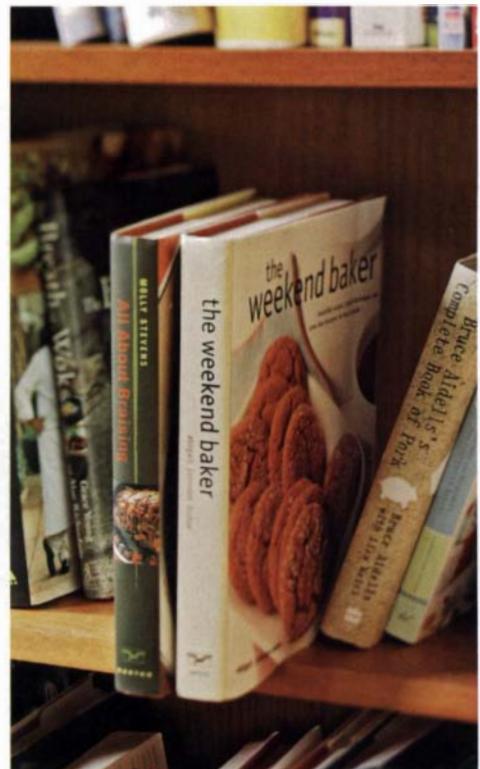
All About Braising: The Art of Uncomplicated Cooking, by Molly Stevens (Norton, \$35).

Don't make another stew or pot roast until you read the first few pages of this book, where Molly reveals the secrets to great technique, intense flavor, and perfect results. "At its most basic," she writes, "braising refers to tucking a few ingredients into a heavy pot with a bit of liquid, covering the pot tightly, and letting everything simmer peacefully until tender and intensely flavored." Had Molly offered nothing more than that enchanting sentence and well-written recipes for such classics as Osso Bucco alla Milanese, Yankee Pot Roast, Country-Style Pork Ribs, and Coq au Vin, I certainly would have liked this book. But Molly doesn't stop there, and that's why I love this book. Her thorough investigation of the art of braising carries her from all manner of braised vegetables to ethnic treats like Vietnamese Braised Scallops and Moroccan Chicken with Olives & Preserved Lemons. She even includes lots

of quick stovetop braises, which give huge payback for very little time and effort.

The Weekend Baker, by Abigail Johnson Dodge (Norton, \$30).

If your life is active—or, as Abby would say, "hectic with occasional insanity"—lament no longer. Prescription-Strength Fudge Brownies, Emergency Blender Cupcakes, and One-Pot Chocolate-Chip Cookies are here to sweeten the day. They take an hour or less to make, and they're the sorts of goodies everyone wants to bake...if only you had the time. Well, none of the yummy failproof recipes in this book requires vast stretches of free time because Abby breaks down the baking processes into discreet parts that slip easily into busy schedules. Her strategies make even involved recipes—such as moist Honey Oatmeal Bread and a glorious Strawberries-and-Cream Layer Cake—feel easy. And her meticulously written recipes never leave you guessing about what to do.



Kimberly Y. Masibay is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦

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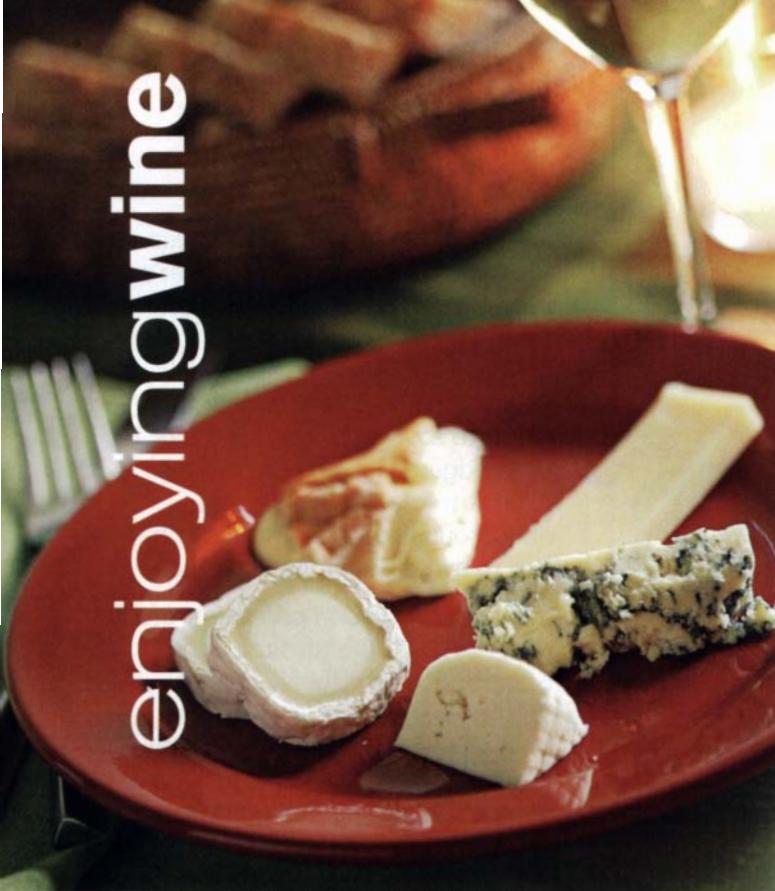


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Wine & Cheese— a great way to end your meal

At this time of year, when you may be doing a fair amount of entertaining, a cheese course is a great way to accompany those last few sips of wine in the glass and to cap off the savory part of the meal. And if you're looking for an interesting alternative to dessert, serving a sweet wine with the right selection of cheeses can be a delightful change of pace. Whether

the wine is dry or sweet, wine and cheese can be a memorable pairing when you get it right: The complex flavors and butterfat in cheese combined with the fruit and tannins in wine can lead to some truly delicious combinations.

But how do you know what combination to try? I often hear people say that they'd love to serve a cheese course but they

(Continued on p. 34)

Serve cheese with your last sips of wine

If you're drinking a medium-bodied red wine...

like one of these:

2002 Edna Valley Vineyards Pinot Noir "Paragon," California; \$17

2003 Segries Côtes du Rhône; \$12

2002 Bogle Merlot, California; \$10

2002 Rancho Zabaco "Dancing Bull" Zinfandel, California; \$9

...serve cheeses with a bit of age

such as:

- ❖ Aged goat cheese, like Boucheron or Crottin de Chavignol
- ❖ Soft-ripened cheese, like Camembert or Époisses
- ❖ Young (year-old) Cheddar
- ❖ Gruyère or other Swiss-style cheeses

why it works:

Medium-bodied red wines are among the most versatile red wines for cheese. Their forward, youthful fruit, and soft tannins can handle cheeses with moderate amounts of butterfat and acidity, as well as richer cheeses.

If you're drinking a full-bodied red wine...

like one of these:

2001 d'Arenberg "Foot-bolt" Shiraz, McLaren Vale, Australia; \$16

1999 Château Poujeaux, Moulis, Bordeaux; \$23

2002 Rivetti Barbera d'Asti "Ca di Pian," Italy; \$25

2000 Mount Eden Cabernet Sauvignon, Santa Cruz Estate, California; \$29

...serve even older cheeses

such as:

- ❖ Aged Gouda (the older the better)
- ❖ Dry Jack or aged Cheddar (two years or older)
- ❖ Asiago
- ❖ Aged Manchego or Parmigiano Reggiano

why it works:

The robust tannins in a Bordeaux, California Cabernet Sauvignon, and other hearty reds need to be tamed by protein and butterfat. With a full-bodied red wine, always look to aged cheeses, which have the highest concentration of butterfat.

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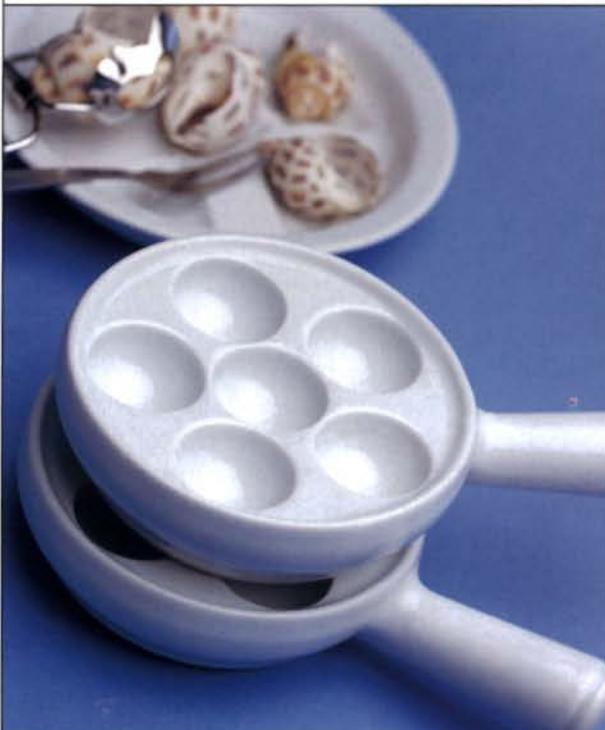
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don't know what cheeses to buy—and which wines to pair with specific cheeses. Indeed, pairing wine with cheese can be tricky because not all wine goes with all cheese.

But rather than try to find the one perfect wine for the right cheese, we're going to take a more practical approach and let the type of wine be our guide. First, we'll assume that you'll probably have wine already on the table from dinner. Maybe you've served poultry or meat, so the wine is probably a

dry red. As a second plan, we'll assume you have some dessert wine you've had a yen to uncork. Either way, we'll give you good, simple options for a cheese selection that will be delicious.

Just like a good wine retailer, a reputable cheesemonger, if you have one nearby, is your best bet in finding really good cheeses and can be a great help in turning you on to new ones. And then you'll be off and running, discovering favorite combinations.

How to serve cheese after a meal

- ❖ Select three, four, or even fine cheeses of varying textures and flavors, following the suggestions on p. 32 and below.
- ❖ Pull the cheese out of the refrigerator an hour or two before serving so it's not too cold: It will taste best that way.
- ❖ Be sure everyone has a salad plate, salad fork, and knife.
- ❖ Pass a platter or portion out each cheese before serving; an ounce per cheese per person is fine.
- ❖ Serve some bread; whole-wheat walnut-raisin is especially tasty with cheese.
- ❖ If you like, include table grapes, sliced apples or pears, dried fruits, or quince paste on the plate as well.

—T.G.

Uncork a bottle of dessert wine after dinner

If you're opening a late-harvest dessert wine...

like one of these:

- 2003 Bonny Doon Muscat
Vin de Glacière, California;
\$17 (375ml)
- 2002 Dry Creek Vineyards
Soleil, Late Harvest Sauvignon
Blanc, California; \$20 (375ml)
- 1999 Château Doisy-
Verdrines Barsac, France;
\$25 (375ml)
- 2001 Beringer Vineyards
Nightingale, Napa Valley (Late
Harvest Semillon-Sauvignon
Blanc); \$35 (375ml)

...serve a wide variety of cheeses

such as:

- ❖ Sheep's milk feta
- ❖ Aged Cheddar
- ❖ Roquefort
- ❖ Stilton

If you're opening a fortified dessert wine...

like one of these:

- NV Chambers Rosewood
Muscat, Australia; \$16 (half
bottle)
- NV "Capataz Andres" Deluxe
Cream Sherry; \$18
- NV Fonseca Bin 27 Port,
Oporto; \$18
- Cossart Gordon Malmsey
Madeira 10-Year; \$30

...serve rich, intense cheeses

such as:

- ❖ Dry Jack
- ❖ Stilton
- ❖ Cabrales

why it works:

The honeyed flavors in dessert wines (brought on by botrytis, a rot that can develop on certain late-harvest white wine grapes) paired with the rich, salty, and tangy flavors in sheep's milk and blue cheeses is one of the most sublime and versatile marriages in all of food and wine pairing: a must-try.

why it works:

The dark fruit, nutty, and toffee-like flavors in fortified wines go magically with the rich butterfat and saltiness in these cheeses. It's a match that's sure to please everyone—especially those with a sweet tooth. The tannins in Port, especially, need the butterfat of a rich cheese.

Tim Gaiser, a master sommelier and a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, drinks wine and eats cheese in San Francisco. Retail prices are approximate. ♦

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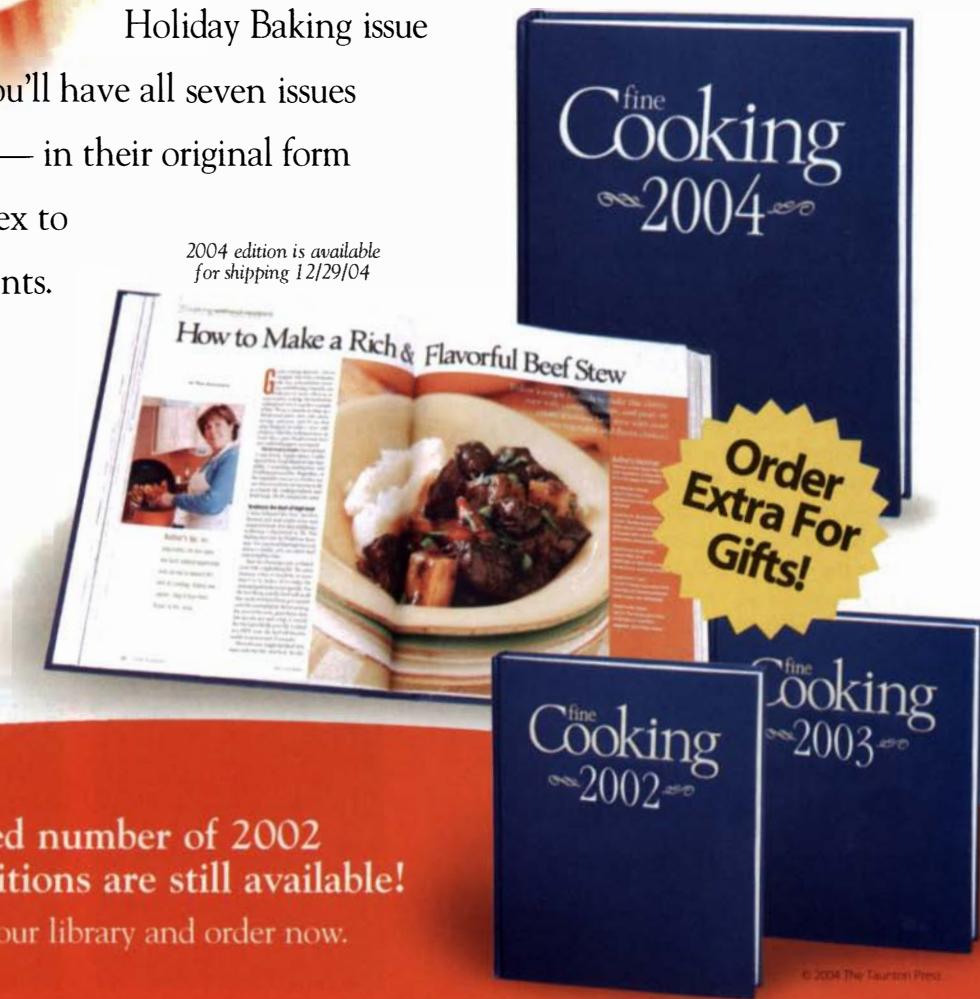
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Pepper mills

The few that stand out are comfortable, spacious, and offer a wide range of grinds

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

I've never loved my pepper mill. The grind adjustment is finicky, the output meager, and often the peppercorns jam. I'm not sure why I've tolerated it for so long, since it's the one kitchen tool I use almost as frequently as my chef's knife.

There's certainly no shortage of pepper mills on the market. They're made from a wide range of materials—wood, stainless steel, acrylic, and glass—and designed to look classy, smart, modern, or just plain peculiar. Yet, as noted in the *New Cooks' Catalogue*, "This is a category of equipment fraught with disappointment."

We agree. After testing 22 mills and grinding a whole lot of peppercorns, we were able to identify only five mills that met all the standards (see How We Tested, below) we consider essential for a pepper mill that's going to get a good workout in the kitchen. Here are the winners.

HOW WE TESTED

For this review, we sought models we could recommend for cooking purposes, not merely for tabletop use. We tested 22 pepper mills from 15 manufacturers. Electric mills were excluded. We evaluated the mills based on their range and consistency of grinds, ease of adjusting the grind, output, capacity, and general design.

In addition to the mills shown here, the following mills were tested: Chef'n Pivot Grinder, littala Citterio, Kyocera Ceramic, Mino Sharp One Hand, Olde Thompson Ultima, Oxo Good Grips, Oxo Grind It, Peppermate, Pepper Mill Imports Atlas (brass Greek-style mill), Perfex, Peugeot Edelstahl, Peugeot Paris, Unicorn Peppergun, Vic Firth Mario Batali, William Bounds Ltd. George, William Bounds Ltd. Millennium, and Zassenhaus.

When to adjust the grind

How coarsely or finely you grind your pepper is a matter of personal taste, but certain grinds are better suited to certain foods.

A fine, powdery grind is ideal when you want the pepper to blend inconspicuously, such as in a salad dressing (unless it's a creamy cracked peppercorn dressing), a purée, or an egg or potato salad.



A medium grind is a good all-purpose setting, whether you're making a pasta dish or seasoning pork chops, a salad, mashed potatoes, or slices of fresh tomato.



Coarsely ground or cracked pepper works best in spice rubs for fish or meat, steak au poivre, Caesar salad, or any time you want the pepper to stand out rather than act as a backdrop to a dish.



Best overall

Unicorn Magnum Plus

\$45 at Peppergun.com

This 9-inch mill cranks out a lot of pepper with little effort. It also holds a whole lot of pepper—about 1½ cups. We were able to adjust it to four distinct ranges of grind—from fine to coarsely cracked—all of which were quite even in consistency. The black plastic housing is sleek, easy to wipe clean, comfortable to grip, and durable. It loads easily through a large hole on the side. A tiny nut on the mill's underside adjusts the grind, so there's no need to reset after filling. It also comes in a 6-inch version, which we did not test.



Four more great performers

Cole & Mason Mayfair Pepper Mill (foreground) and Cherry Pepper Mill (background)

\$60 for the Mayfair and \$45 for the Cherry, both at Williams-sonoma.com.

We grouped these two classic-looking mills from the same English manufacturer because of their strong similarities. We liked both for their comfortable feel, respectable output, and general ease of use. Neither had a wide range of grinds but offered at least three: medium-fine, medium, and coarse. A nut at the top adjusts the grind, although we found we had to tip the mill upside down while adjusting the nut to get a clear change in the grind's consistency. Surprisingly, neither mill holds a lot of peppercorns. The 12-inch Mayfair holds just 2 ounces of peppercorns (about 6 tablespoons), and the 8-inch Cherry holds just 1½ ounces (about 4 tablespoons).



Peugeot Zanzibar Pepper Mill

\$19.99 at Amazon.com

This inexpensive and easy-to-operate mill lets you feel as if you're in command. It has a remarkably wide range of grinds, from ultrafine to coarsely cracked. You'll need to reset the grind adjustment (set at the top of the body), however, after refilling. This mill's grinding mechanism has a patented coating to resist corrosion from humidity (such as from using over a pot of steaming food). One clear drawback: at just 5 inches tall, it holds only 1 ounce of peppercorns (about 3 tablespoons). On the flip side, it's very easy to load (thanks to a wide opening), and the clear acrylic body makes it apparent when it's due for a refill.



William Bounds Ltd. Professional

\$34.95 at Chefsresource.com

We liked how the three-step adjusting ring on this mill takes the guesswork out of setting the grind—and holds it even during refilling. The fine grind setting is extremely fine, which many other mills couldn't pull off. The grinding mechanism (made of ceramic for endurance and corrosion resistance) churned out a respectable amount of pepper with minimal effort. Testers found the mill comfortable to grip and easy to operate—not requiring a lot of force. But it isn't the easiest mill to load, and it's on the heavy side (almost 1¼ pounds).

What to look for in a pepper mill

The pepper mill market is a very crowded one, so you'll undoubtedly come across many mills that didn't make this review. If you're shopping for one, remember this: It's difficult to evaluate a pepper mill by looking at it. You really need to fill it with peppercorns and try it out. Here's what to notice.

Get a handle on the handle

A detour from the classic bulb twist-top might seem more intriguing,

but we discovered a reason for this design's longevity: Few others, including crank styles, worked as efficiently, producing as much pepper with as little effort.

Verify its capacity

The height of a pepper mill isn't a reliable indicator of how much pepper it can hold. One of the tallest mills in the test held only ½ ounce more peppercorns than the shortest one. Even if you open up the mill and

visually check the storage area, it can be tricky to gauge its capacity.

Assess its grinding ability

It's impossible to know how fluidly and abundantly a pepper mill will work until you try it. Most of the mills in our tests had an adjustment for a range of grinds, and all of our favorites had at least three distinct ranges (fine, medium, and coarse) that were also relatively even in consistency.

Maryellen Driscoll
is Fine Cooking's
editor at large. ♦

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READERSERVICENO. 67

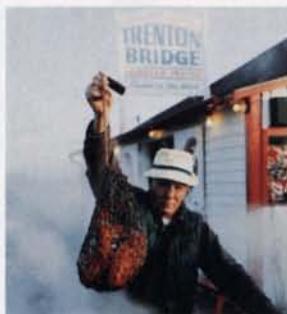


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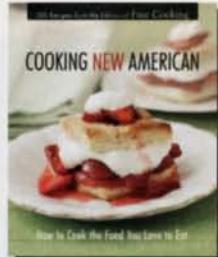


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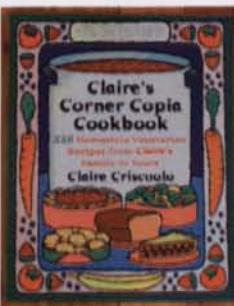
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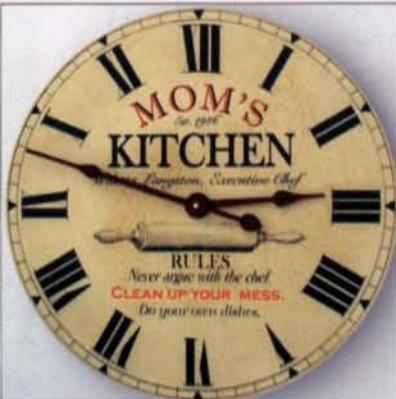
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The prize for this issue's winner: a 7.25-quart enameled cast-iron Dutch oven from Staub; value, \$230.



Winning tip

Peel shrimp in a jiffy

We eat a lot of shrimp here in Key West, and the best tool I've found for peeling them is a zip letter opener (the small handheld plastic kind that are given away as promotional items). It quickly splits open the shell and separates the flesh for easy deveining.

—Doug Pryor, Key West, Florida

Store mushrooms in a paper bag

Mushrooms get slimy if you leave them in a plastic produce container or bag for more than a day or two. So when I bring mushrooms home from the market, the first thing I do is remove them from the plastic container. I line the bottom of a paper bag with a folded paper towel, arrange a single layer of mushrooms on the towel, and cover them with another folded paper towel, continuing until the bag is almost full. Before stashing the bag in the refrigerator, I fold down the top and secure it with a binder clip. Stored this way, really fresh mushrooms last for up to two weeks.

—Ruth Fairall, Eldorado, Texas



Spaghetti "toothpicks"

Tenting plastic wrap with toothpicks keeps the plastic from adhering to frosting or other sticky food, but if you don't have toothpicks, uncooked dry spaghetti will do in a pinch.

—R. B. Himes, Vienna, Ohio

Colored plastic wrap identifies special dishes

While getting ready for a recent party, I covered the items I prepped in advance with green "holiday" plastic wrap before storing them in my always-crowded refrigerator. On the day of my party, it was easy to identify which bowls were my party dishes.

—Carol Crites, Los Altos, California

Roll out the lobster

When I splurge on lobster, I don't want to waste a single delicious morsel. To get the meat out of those long skinny legs, I remove the leg and run a rolling pin over it, from the "foot" up. The meat pops right out.

—Christine Adams, Charlottesville, Virginia



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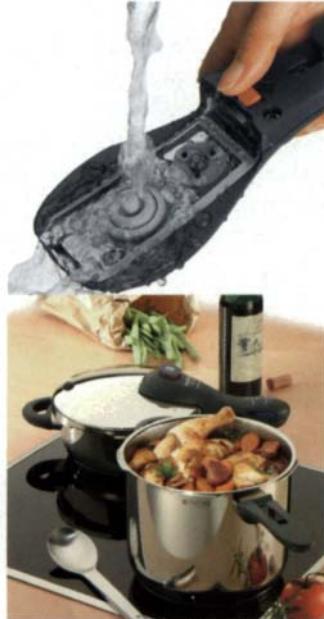
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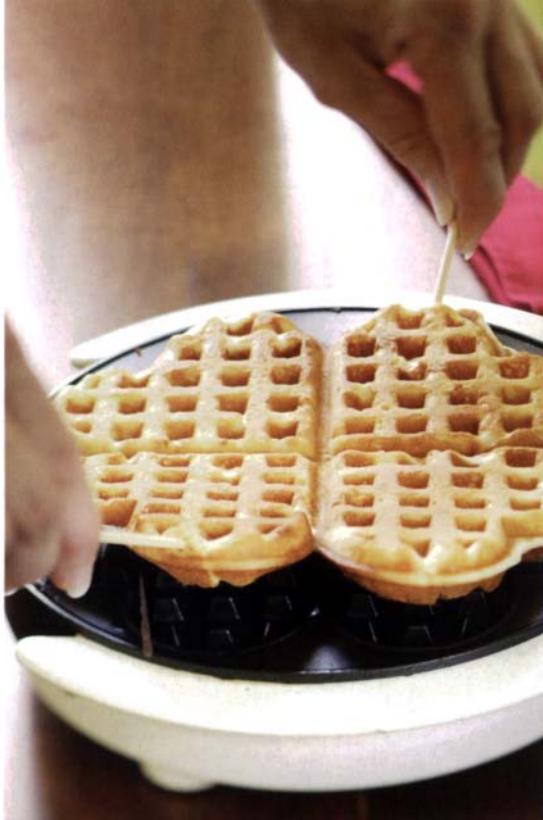
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Skewer that waffle

To remove an obstinate waffle from the waffle iron, I insert two bamboo skewers horizontally through opposite sides of the waffle and gently pull them away from the iron. The waffle comes away more neatly than when I use a fork or spatula.

—Georganna Ulary,
Red Hook, New York

preparing chicken cutlets

Pound cutlets with a barbell

I recently made Lori Longbotham's delicious Chicken Salad Milanese recipe from *Fine Cooking* #66 (p. 48). During the preparation, my meat pounder broke, and, with guests arriving soon, I had to find something else fast. I ended up using the flat end of a 4-pound dumbbell to pound the meat between two sheets of plastic wrap. It actually worked better than a real meat pounder because it's heavier, thus quicker, and has a wider surface, so you get a more uniform thickness to the meat.

—Darlene Wong,
Toronto, Ontario

A neat place for a pepper mill

When my pepper mill isn't in use, it stands in a ramekin, which keeps residual ground pepper from dirtying my counter.

—Peter Hyzak,
Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida



The thinnest garlic slices

I don't have much occasion to use a truffle slicer for its intended purpose, but it's essentially a small mandoline, so it comes in handy for other tasks. For example, if you run a clove of garlic over the blade, you get tissue-thin slices that are a perfect last-minute flavor-booster for sauces and sautés.

—Al Bowers, Athens, Georgia

Boil potatoes in a pasta pot

I boil potatoes in a pasta pot with a colander insert because it's much easier to drain the cooked potatoes by lifting out the colander than it is to lug a pot of boiling water to a colander in the sink.

—Colleen Lanigan-Ambrose,
Seal Beach, California



At last, a tool for removing sticky fruit labels

For years, I tried to find an easy way to remove those little produce stickers from tomatoes, stone fruit, apples, and pears without tearing the fruits' skin. When I recently bought a serrated peeler, I discovered that I could use it to lift the edge of label away from the fruit and peel it off without taking a chunk of fruit with it.

—Charlotte Kornhauser, Clark, New Jersey



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READER SERVICE NO. 113

A Sensational Menu That Lets You

Wrap up a filet of beef and a savory mushroom filling like a gift to create the centerpiece of this do-ahead menu

BY RANDALL PRICE

Despite my job as a private chef, I love to entertain at home on my nights off, and I'm always willing to go the extra mile to make a dinner unforgettable. But I'm often torn between two objectives. On the one hand, I want to make a spectacular meal that will delight, impress, and satisfy my guests. On the other, I want to have some fun myself, and I don't want to spend the whole night in the kitchen.

This menu lets me have it all. It will satisfy basic tastes as well as sophisticated palates. It will surely garner you many compliments, and yet it won't cause last-minute stress. The first course and dessert can and should be made days ahead, and the main course is assembled in advance, which means you'll be free to enjoy yourself. The recipes I've included here are my modern versions of some classic dishes. There are a few tricks to understand but don't worry—the secrets are revealed here in plain talk.

Soup is a great way to start a holiday meal, and almost every soup tastes better when made ahead. What makes this tomato soup extraordinary is the fresh orange and cumin that flavor it; they lend a mysterious, extra-special something, and guests usually have fun guessing



Be With Your Guests



dinner for six

Tomato Soup with
Orange & Cumin

Individual Beef
Croustades
with Boursin &
Mushrooms

Baby Spinach with
Scallions & Lemon

Chocolate Mousse

Modern twists for favorite classics: Crisp, buttery phyllo wraps up a filet (above); tomato soup gets a kick from citrus (left); no egg whites means an extra-rich mousse (right).



what the flavors are. For the main course, I've chosen luxurious beef tenderloin. It's rich and tender, but because it's milder in flavor than tougher cuts, I've added the earthy, piquant elements of mushrooms and cheese. Instead of fussy puff pastry, which often comes out soggy, I use thin sheets of store-bought phyllo to envelop the meat, beggar's purse style, for a new take on individual beef Wellingtons—I call them croustades. The golden, ruffled packages add drama to the table, and the flavors are so satisfying that no sauce is needed.

Sautéed spinach is an ideal side dish for entertaining because it's very forgiving and can handle standing and reheating. You can cook the spinach before your guests arrive and then reheat it gently as you're taking the beef croustades out of the oven.

For dessert, a simple and sensational chocolate mousse is just the thing. Just before serving, plop a pillow of lightly whipped plain cream in the center of each serving and scatter on chocolate shavings.

To facilitate your genius in the kitchen, follow the timetable on p. 48 and build the dinner in steps. When you've finished the last morsel of dinner, your guests will be happy and satisfied—and you'll be reeling with well-deserved praise.

reader review

A *Fine Cooking* reader gave this menu a real-world test. Here's what she reported:

"I loved that this menu delivered what it promised—that you can be with your guests. Following the timetable was very helpful. I was able to do a small task each day, which added up to a delicious meal! The light tomato soup complemented the rich beef croustades perfectly."

—Carolyn Spangler,
Wellesley, Massachusetts

Tomato Soup with Orange & Cumin

Serves six; yields about 10 cups.

- 1 small yellow onion (5 ounces), peeled and quartered
- 2/3 cup fresh orange juice (from about 1 large orange)
- 1 medium baking potato (9 ounces), peeled and cut into large chunks
- 2 ounces (1/4 cup) unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 3 bay leaves
- 2 cans (28 ounces each) peeled whole tomatoes (without basil), with their juices
- 1 tablespoon packed finely grated orange zest (from 1 large orange)
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt; more to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Snipped fresh chives for garnish

Put the onion, orange juice, potato, butter, cumin, bay leaves, and 3 cups water in a large (at least 4-quart) saucepan. Cover, bring to a boil over high heat, and reduce to a simmer. Cook until a skewer easily pierces the potato, 15 to 20 minutes. Add the tomatoes with their juices and the orange zest. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to maintain a steady, low simmer, and cook, uncovered, until the potato chunks are falling apart, another 20 minutes. Discard the bay leaves. Purée the soup with an hand blender, stand blender, or food processor. Strain through a medium sieve; discard the contents of the sieve. Season with salt and pepper. If not serving immediately, let cool completely before refrigerating or freezing. Heat gently, adjust the salt and pepper as needed, garnish with the chives, and serve.



Mushroom Filling

Yields enough to fill six croustades.

- 1 pound fresh white button or cremini mushrooms, cleaned
- 2 medium shallots
- 1 clove garlic, cut in half
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Trim the mushroom stems close to the caps. Put the mushrooms, shallots, and garlic in a food processor and pulse until finely chopped but not puréed; scrape the bowl as needed. Transfer the chopped mushrooms to the center of a clean dishtowel. Gather up the sides of the towel and twist, keeping the mushrooms well contained in the cloth, bonbon style. With one hand, hold the ball of mushrooms over the sink; with the other hand, twist the gathered cloth, squeezing out as much liquid as possible.

Heat the butter and oil in a 10-inch skillet or sauté pan over medium heat. Add the mushrooms, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms are very soft and fragrant, 3 to 5 minutes. Don't let them brown. Uncover and cook until the pan is mostly dry, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the parsley; season with 1/2 teaspoon salt and pepper to taste. The filling can be refrigerated for up to a week or frozen for up to two weeks. If frozen, thaw overnight in the refrigerator and, if necessary, cook gently in an uncovered skillet to evaporate any juices that may have developed in the freezer.

Strain the soup through a medium sieve to ensure a silky texture.

Individual Beef Croustades with Boursin & Mushrooms

Serves six.

Ask for filets from near the tail end of the tenderloin so they're tall and narrow, rather than short and wide.

6 filets mignons, 6 ounces each and about 1 3/4 inches thick

Kosher salt

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

2 cakes (5.2 ounces each) peppercorn Boursin cheese, slightly softened at room temperature

1-pound package phyllo dough (with at least 24 sheets, preferably more), thawed in the refrigerator overnight (see p. 74 for phyllo handling tips)

1/4 pound (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, melted; more if needed

1/4 cup thinly sliced fresh chives

Mushroom Filling (at left)

Season the filets mignons generously on all sides with salt. Heat the butter and oil in a 10-inch skillet or sauté pan over medium-high heat until very hot and sizzling.

1 Put three of the filets in the pan and sear on one side until well browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Turn and brown the other side. Then quickly sear along the sides, using tongs to turn, about another 1 minute per side. Transfer to a plate lined with paper towels. Repeat with the remaining filets. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

To assemble: Mash the Boursin with a fork in a small bowl until spreadable. Remove at least 24 sheets of phyllo from the package and cut them into 10-inch squares. Cover them with plastic wrap and a damp dishtowel while you work to keep them from drying out. Lay a single phyllo sheet on a clean, dry surface. With a pastry brush, lightly paint an even coat of the melted butter over the entire surface of the square. Sprinkle with about 1/2 teaspoon of the chives. Set a second sheet at a 90-degree angle over the first. Brush butter over it as well and sprinkle with another 1/2 teaspoon chives.

2 Make four layers, omitting the chives from the last layer, with the corners of the phyllo pointing in different directions, starlike. Blot one

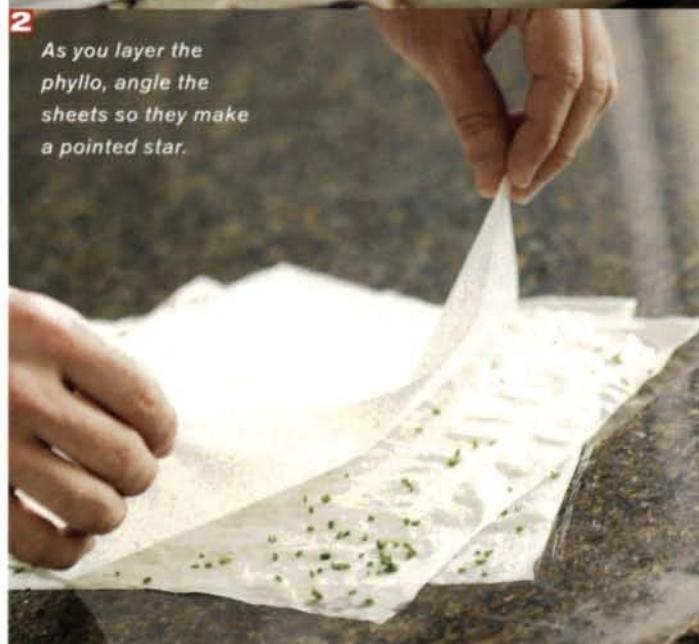
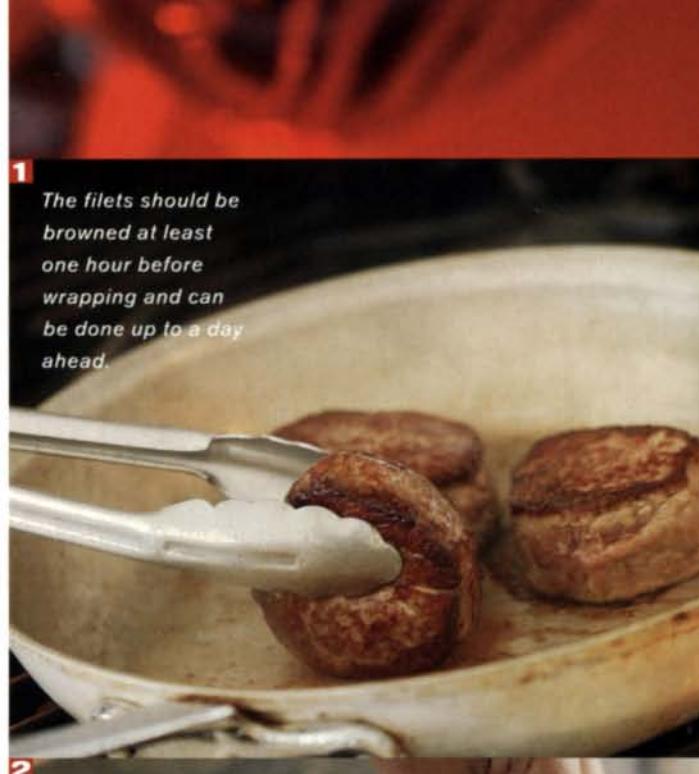
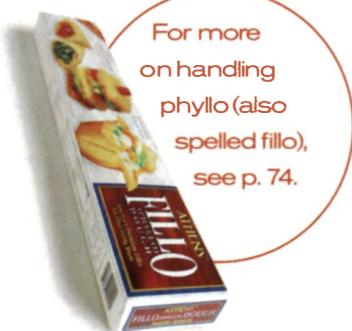
The croustades can be assembled up to eight hours before cooking, refrigerated, and brought to room temperature.

filet dry with a paper towel, set it in the center of the star, and sprinkle it with salt. Spread about 2 tablespoons of the Boursin on the filet and top that with 2 generous tablespoons of the mushroom filling.

3 Pick a starting point and work your way around the filet, gathering the edges of the phyllo star together, beggar's purse style. Lightly pinch together the gathered phyllo close to the surface of the meat to hold it in place. Pull the corners open slightly as if making a paper flower. Brush the whole exposed surface lightly with more butter, being sure that the bottom is buttered as well. Transfer to a heavy baking sheet. Repeat this "packaging" for the remaining filets. If you're working ahead, chill the filets uncovered on the baking sheet until ready to bake, up to 8 hours.

To bake: Take the croustades out of the refrigerator about 20 minutes before you're ready to bake them. Position an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Bake the croustades, rotating the baking sheet after 10 minutes to ensure even browning, until an instant-read thermometer inserted through the side of each packet and into the center of the filet reads 130°F for medium rare, 17 to 22 minutes. Serve immediately.

For more on handling phyllo (also spelled fillo), see p. 74.



timetable

Three days ahead

- ❖ Make the tomato soup.
(This could also be made up to two weeks ahead and frozen.)

Two days ahead

- ❖ Make the chocolate mousse.

One day ahead

- ❖ Make the mushroom filling.
(This could also be made up to two weeks ahead and frozen.)
- ❖ Clean the spinach.
- ❖ Brown the filets.

That morning

- ❖ Assemble and refrigerate the beef croustades.
- ❖ Make the chocolate shavings for the mousse garnish.

Two hours before

- ❖ Cook the spinach. (Leave it in the pan to reheat at serving time.)
- ❖ Lightly whip the heavy cream for the mousse garnish; refrigerate.

As guests arrive

- ❖ Reheat the soup over low heat.
- ❖ Heat the oven.
- ❖ Open wine for dinner.

Just before dinner

- ❖ Put the croustades in the oven.
(When you clear the soup plates the croustades will be ready. Take them out of the oven and let them sit a minute while you reheat the spinach.)

Baby Spinach with Scallions & Lemon

Serves six.

This is very forgiving and keeps while sitting in the pan on the stove until you're ready to reheat it and serve.

**2½ pounds baby spinach
3 tablespoons olive oil
4 scallions, trimmed and sliced,
white and green parts separated
Kosher salt and freshly ground
black pepper
1 tablespoon lightly packed finely
grated lemon zest (from about
1 large lemon)
½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg**

Rinse and drain the spinach. (You needn't dry it completely; clinging droplets of water are fine.) Heat the olive oil in a large, deep Dutch oven or wok over medium heat. Add the scallion whites and cook, stirring, until they start to soften, about 1 minute. Pile in the spinach and cook, turning with tongs so it gets evenly heated. (You'll need to add the spinach in



stages; as it heats, it will shrink.) Once all the spinach is in the pan, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until all the leaves have wilted and released their liquid, about 2 minutes. Uncover the pan, increase the heat to high, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the spinach is very soft, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and season with salt and pepper to taste. Just before serving, reheat gently, adding the scallion greens, lemon zest, and grated nutmeg. Drain briefly in a colander before serving.

drink choices

A wine-based apéritif is a great way to begin any meal: Sip it before dinner and then serve it paired with the Tomato Soup with Orange & Cumin, too. Dubonnet Rouge (\$14) and St. Raphael Rouge (\$16), both from France, are vermouth-like apéritifs that are widely available. Serve them chilled with a thin slice of orange. The Beef Croustades with Boursin & Mushrooms call for a rich, velvety Pinot Noir with the complexity to match the creamy-earthy elements in the package. Try Gallo of Sonoma's 2002 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$13), the 2002 David Bruce Central Coast Pinot Noir (\$19) or the 2002 "J" Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$28), all from California. If you're up

for a splurge, stick with Pinot Noir, but make it a red Burgundy. For my money, two truly special bottles are the 2000 Domaine Marquis d'Angerville Volnay 1er Cru "Champans" (\$45) and the 1999 Louis Jadot Beaune 1er Cru "Clos des Ursules" (\$58).

If you'd like to serve dessert wine, the sweet, chocolatey mousse calls for a sweet fortified wine like sherry or port. Try the Emilio Lustau Moscatel Superior "Emilin Jerez" Sherry (\$22) or the 1992 Smith Woodhouse Late-Bottled Vintage Port (\$25). (Retail prices are approximate.)

Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor for Fine Cooking, is a master sommelier.



Just before serving, give the sautéed spinach a fresh hit of flavor with lemon zest, scallion greens, and nutmeg.

This mousse is lightened with whipped cream only (no egg whites), so the chocolate flavor remains intense and creamy.

Chocolate Mousse

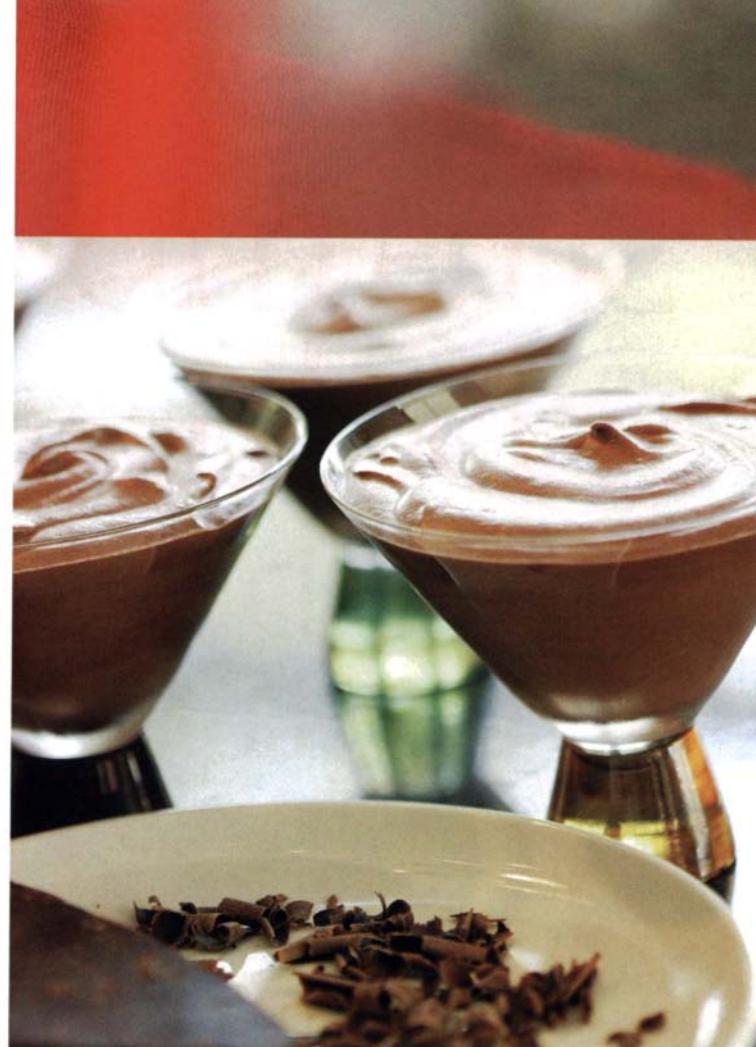
Serves six; yields about 6½ cups.

It's essential to use the best-quality dark eating chocolate you can find.

10 ounces best-quality bittersweet chocolate, chopped (I like Lindt)
¼ cup strong brewed coffee
¾ cup whole milk
4 large egg yolks
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
Pinch kosher salt
2 cups cold heavy cream; plus another ½ cup for garnish
3 tablespoons dark chocolate shavings for garnish (optional)

Put the chocolate and coffee in a heavy saucepan. Heat gently over low heat until the chocolate starts to melt; set aside. In a medium saucepan, heat the milk until bubbles begin to form around the edge; don't let it boil. In a small mixing bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the sugar and a pinch of salt just until well blended.

Whisk half of the hot milk into the egg yolks. Return the yolk mixture to the milk in the saucepan. Cook slowly over low heat, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon, until the custard thickens slightly and coats the back of the spoon (enough so that a finger run through the sauce will leave a clean trail). The time it takes for this thickening to occur will vary. It may take as little as a few minutes or as many as 20, but once the thickening begins, it happens quickly; watch carefully or the eggs will coagulate. Check with a thermometer; don't let the temperature exceed 160°F. Immediately pour



the custard through a strainer over the partially melted chocolate. Whisk until smooth. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and let cool, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is about 96°F; if you dab a bit on your lip, it should feel just slightly cooler than your lip. Don't let the mixture set or the mousse won't be smooth. (If it cools too far, set it over a pan of hot water briefly and whisk until smooth.)

Beat 2 cups of the heavy cream until it holds soft peaks. With a rubber spatula, gently fold half of the whipped cream into the chocolate mixture until no white streaks remain. Gently fold in the remaining whipped cream. Spoon the mousse into six goblets or one large bowl. Cover and chill for at least 3 hours or up to two days.

To serve, beat the remaining ½ cup heavy cream until it holds soft peaks. Dollop a little on each serving and scatter with the chocolate shavings, if using.

This memorable chocolate mousse hardly needs a garnish, but a few chocolate shavings and a dollop of whipped cream can dress it up.

Randall Price, a private chef, divides his time between Paris, Burgundy, and the Auvergne. ♦

shrimp cocktail better than ever

BY RORI TROVATO

As a food stylist and a recipe developer, I hang out with a lot of other "chef types." But when we find ourselves together at a party—no matter how fancy it is, how famous the chefs, or how trendy the food—we all seem to gravitate toward the same classic nibble: shrimp cocktail. And no wonder. It's got everything you could want—succulence, zip, tang, and a bit of heat. But perhaps the greatest thing about this crowd-pleaser is that it's over-the-top easy to make at home.

My versions of shrimp cocktail always begin with raw shell-on shrimp. (Buying precooked peeled shrimp may save you time, but at the cost of good taste and texture.) Shrimp loves to soak up flavors, so by using different cooking methods and seasonings, it's easy to add unexpected depth and interest to the hors d'oeuvre. My pan-seared version has a smoky dimension that's completely different from the traditional recipe. In my most traditional version, I poach the shrimp in a flavorful broth. And my roasted version has a garlicky punch that's great with my jalapeño-spiked cocktail sauce. Each method lets you control the cooking, so that your own shrimp cocktail has a pleasantly crunchy texture, not an overcooked, rubbery one.



Warm Seared Shrimp Cocktail

Serves four to six.

In winter, I make these shrimp in a grill pan on the stove, which actually delivers lots of grilled flavor, but you can cook the shrimp on a real grill, too. Although shrimp cocktail is traditionally served cold, I break with convention and serve this version warm.

**1½ pounds jumbo shrimp (16-20 count), shells peeled, tails left on
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon cracked black pepper
Cocktail Sauce (at left) or your favorite citrus vinaigrette**

Remove the vein from the shrimp, if necessary. In a large bowl, toss the shrimp with the olive oil, salt, and pepper. Heat a grill pan over medium-high heat until very hot. Working in batches, grill the shrimp for 2 to 3 minutes per side, using tongs to turn, until slightly charred and firm. Serve immediately with the cocktail sauce or a citrus vinaigrette. Or for a cold shrimp cocktail, transfer the shrimp to a baking dish or baking sheet, cover, and refrigerate for 2 to 3 hours before serving.

COCKTAIL SAUCE WITH RED ONION & JALAPEÑO

Yields 1½ cups.

**½ cup tomato ketchup
½ cup chili sauce
¼ cup grated red onion (from about ¼ medium onion; using the large holes on a box grater)
½ teaspoon finely chopped fresh jalapeño
3 tablespoons prepared horseradish
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice; more to taste
⅛ teaspoon kosher salt; more to taste**

Put all the ingredients in a bowl and stir to combine. Chill, covered, until ready to use. This sauce is best made a day in advance and keeps well for up to a week. Just before serving, taste and add more lemon juice and salt as needed.



Lemon Poached Shrimp Cocktail

Serves four to six.

Shrimp are much more flavorful when poached with their shells on. Don't rinse the cooked shrimp or you'll lose the delicious flavor of the poaching liquid.

2 cups dry white wine
1 cup water
6 black peppercorns
2 bay leaves
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 large lemon, cut in half
1½ pounds jumbo shrimp (16-20 count), unpeeled
Cocktail Sauce (at far left)

In a 10-inch straight-sided sauté pan with a lid, combine the wine, water, peppercorns, bay leaves, and salt. Gently squeeze the lemon halves over the liquid and then drop in the halves. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce the heat to medium low, and let the liquid simmer gently for 10 minutes. Add the shrimp, cover, and poach for 4 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the shrimp sit in the covered pan for another 2 minutes. Transfer the shrimp to a colander with a slotted spoon; discard the poaching liquid. Let the shrimp sit in the colander until they're cool enough to handle, about 15 minutes, and then shell them and devein them, if necessary. Chill for at least 2 hours or up to a day. Serve cold with cocktail sauce.



Garlic Roasted Shrimp Cocktail

Serves four to six.

Roasting the shrimp with garlic gives them a punch that's great with my spicy cocktail sauce.

1½ pounds jumbo shrimp (16-20 count), shells peeled, tails left on
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped (about 1 tablespoon)
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon cracked black pepper
Cocktail Sauce (at far left)

Heat the oven to 450°F. Remove the vein from the shrimp, if necessary. In a large bowl, toss the shrimp with the garlic, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Spread the shrimp on a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet in a single layer. Roast for 3 minutes, turn the shrimp over with tongs, and continue roasting until the shrimp are opaque and firm, another 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer the shrimp to a shallow dish, cover partially, and refrigerate. When the shrimp are thoroughly chilled (after about 2 hours), serve them with cocktail sauce.

Rori Trovato, a chef and food stylist, is the author of *Dishing with Style*. ♦

creating elegant Winter Salads

BY MARIA HELM SINSKEY

Forget flavorless tomatoes—to make great salads now, choose truly seasonal ingredients with contrasting flavors and textures

As a child, I found it ironic that the name of the only lettuce we had in upstate New York in the middle of winter was "Iceberg." Fast-forward 35 years. Now when the temperature drops, I know that my favorite parade of winter greens will soon be in full swing, giving me a variety of choices. Greens that normally cower in the heat of summer turn lush and full in the low light and frequent rains of early winter.

In an elegant menu, a seasonal salad can whet appetites at the start of a meal or revivify palates after a hearty main course. Great winter salads refreshingly lack the predictable ingredients found at other times of the year. I banish flavorless tomatoes and cucumbers from my table and embrace the remarkable number of fabulous fruits and vegetables that winter has to offer.

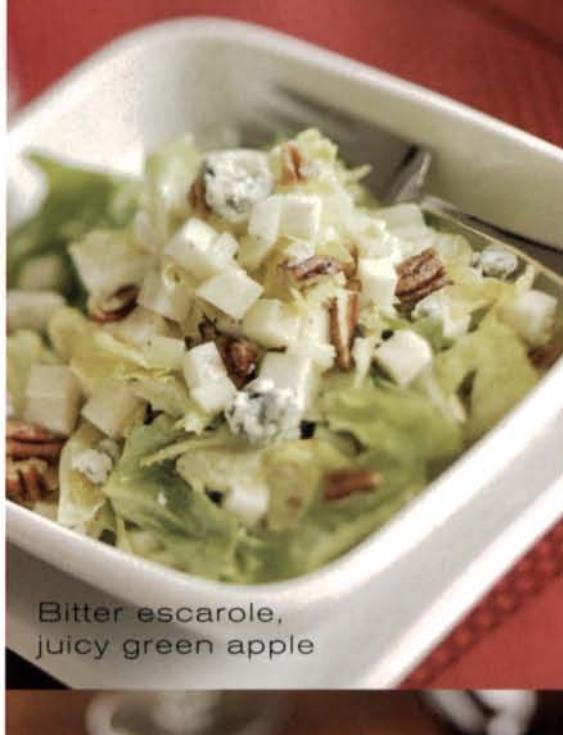
When making salads, my number-one rule is to keep it simple. No one wants to chop ingredients for half the day. After

choosing greens, I limit additional ingredients to four (not including those in the vinaigrette), because any more than that tends to clutter a salad. It's important to choose ingredients that provide contrasting textures and flavors, all of which play off of one another. I've included three recipes that follow this flavor-texture principle, but you can also design your own salad combinations—see the opposite page for ingredient ideas.

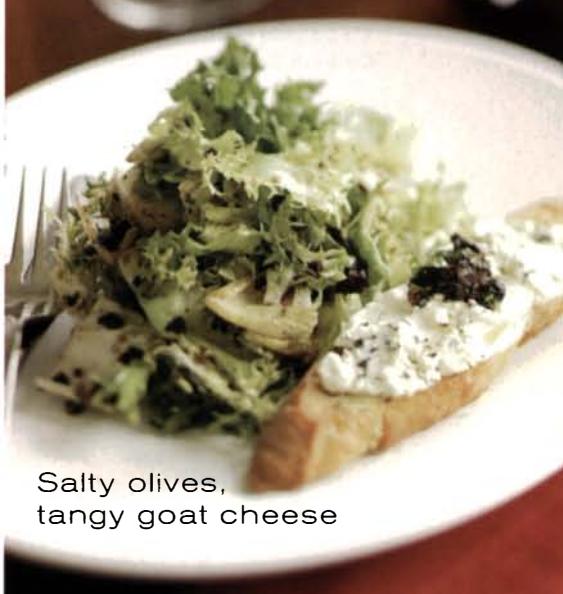
Choose and handle your ingredients carefully. Remember that all of your salad's elements are equally important; it doesn't make sense to buy beautiful greens and then compromise on everything else. Sturdy winter lettuce can be washed a day or two ahead of time; just be sure to spin the leaves dry and store them in a sealed plastic bag with a slightly damp paper towel to prevent dehydration. I like to clean enough lettuce for a couple of days so I can toss a salad together at the last minute.



Sweet blood oranges,
crunchy fennel



Bitter escarole,
juicy green apple



Salty olives,
tangy goat cheese

How to design a winter salad

I like to vary my salad ingredients, using contrasting elements that are bitter, crunchy, sweet, juicy, salty, and tangy. I've set out some ideas for ingredients below, but in the end, you decide what goes into your salad. Stick with ingredients you love and you'll seldom fail.



salty, tangy

The intensity of salty ingredients like olives, capers, and cheese is a great foil for bitter greens. Cheeses not only supply salty, tangy flavor, but also creaminess and body.

Choosing oils and vinegars

In all vinaigrettes, I recommend using a good extra-virgin olive oil. (If you find it too strong for your palate, dilute it with a cold-pressed neutral oil like canola or safflower.) But don't buy good olive oil and skimp on the vinegar. My shelves weigh heavily with many varieties of vinegar, each of which has a different flavor and acidity level. I use Champagne and white-wine vinegars for lighter salads, cider vinegar for salads that contain apples, and red-wine and sherry vinegars for salads that include strong cheeses. Experiment with different vinegars to find ones that you like.

bitter

Bitterness is not a bad thing when it comes to salad, so you should never shy away from it. Bitter greens refresh the palate, provide contrast to vinaigrettes, and serve as a sturdy base for other ingredients. For texture, I like to mix several different greens together—try chicory, Belgian endive, frisée, radicchio, or arugula.



sweet, juicy

Fruits lend juiciness and softness to salads. Apples, pears, oranges, blood oranges, and grapefruit make sweet and refreshing additions.



crunchy

Ingredients like crisp vegetables, croutons, and toasted nuts provide texture and crunch. Nuts can be toasted a day or two in advance and stored in airtight containers.





For a more evenly seasoned vinaigrette...

Dissolve a measured amount of salt in the vinegar before whisking in the oil. (When salt is suspended in oil, it won't dissolve unless it works its way into a pocket of vinegar.) Because acid, whether from fruit or vinegar, accentuates salt, do your final seasoning toward the end of tossing your salad.

Arugula with Blood Oranges, Fennel & Ricotta Salata

Serves six to eight.

The sweetness of blood oranges will vary, so if you find that they're making your vinaigrette too sweet, compensate by adjusting the amount of sherry vinegar to taste. If you can't find blood oranges, substitute a mix of pink grapefruit and orange sections.

2 teaspoons minced shallots
6 small blood oranges
2½ tablespoons sherry vinegar
¼ teaspoon sea salt or kosher salt; more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ pound baby arugula (6 to 7 cups)
1 medium fennel bulb (about ¾ pound)
¼ pound ricotta salata, shaved with a vegetable peeler to yield about 1 cup

Put the shallots in a small bowl. Squeeze one of the blood oranges to get 2 tablespoons of juice. Add the juice and the vinegar to the shallots. Season the mixture with the salt and a few grinds of black pepper. Let sit for 10 minutes and then whisk in the olive oil. Reserve the vinaigrette at room temperature until ready to use (for up to 2 hours) or make up to one day in advance and store, tightly covered, in the refrigerator. Bring to room temperature and whisk again before using.

Trim any long stems from the arugula, wash the leaves well, and spin them dry. Put the arugula in a large bowl, cover with a slightly damp towel, and refrigerate until ready to toss.

With a serrated knife, remove the peel and pith from the blood oranges. Cut the oranges in half lengthwise and slice into ¼-inch-thick half moons. Reserve in a small bowl at room temperature (or refrigerate, tightly wrapped, if working ahead).

Trim the stalks from the fennel bulb. Cut the bulb in half lengthwise through the core. Cut out the core in a wedge. Shave the fennel lengthwise with a vegetable peeler or on a mandoline. You will have ribbons, not crescents. (If you have crescents, you're slicing crosswise instead of lengthwise; see p. 74 for more on slicing fennel.) To avoid discoloration, cut the fennel as close to serving time as possible. Don't soak the fennel in water, or you'll dilute the intensity of its flavor.

Add the fennel to the arugula and toss. Whisk the vinaigrette to recombine. Add the vinaigrette to the arugula and fennel and toss again. Season with salt and pepper. Add the blood oranges and toss gently. Divide among salad plates and distribute the ricotta salata over each salad.

Escarole with Green Apple, Celery Root, Toasted Pecans & Blue Cheese

Serves six to eight.

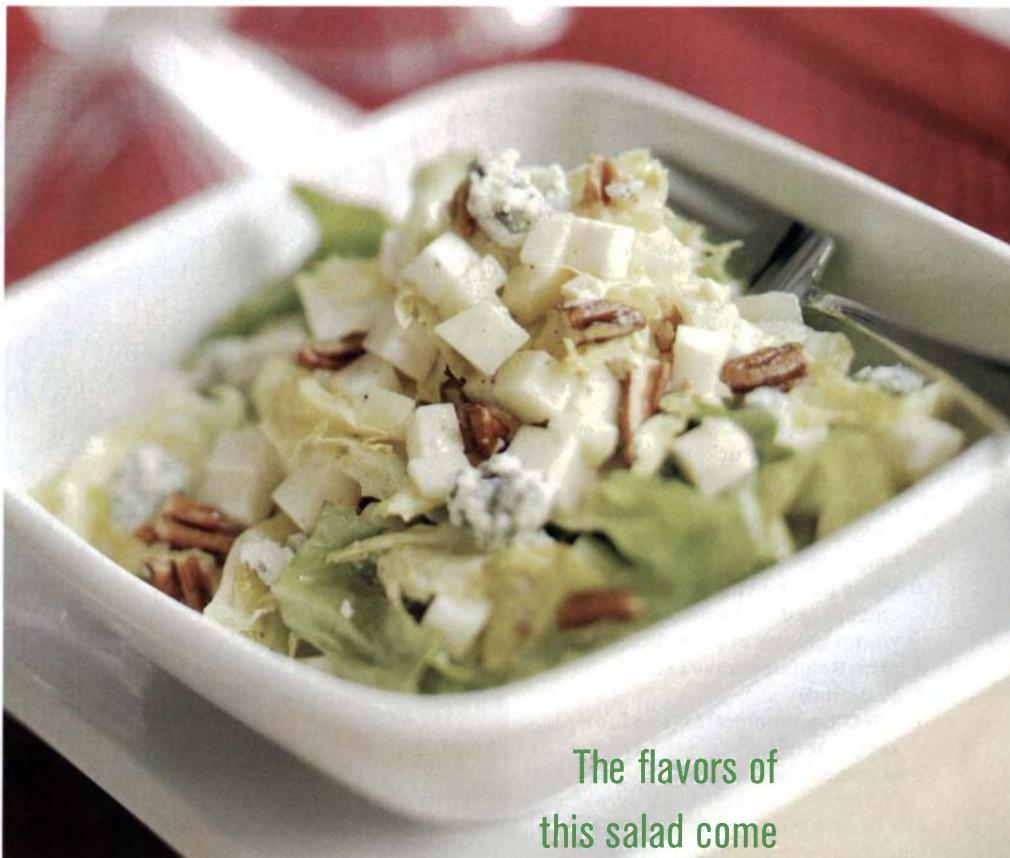
The vinaigrette tastes best when made ahead, so prepare it up to two days before serving and store it in the refrigerator, tightly covered. Bring the vinaigrette to room temperature and whisk lightly before dressing the salad.

**2 tablespoons cider vinegar
1 tablespoon minced shallot
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1/4 teaspoon sea salt or kosher salt;
more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 pound good-quality blue cheese (I like Maytag or Point Reyes Original), crumbled to yield about 1 cup
1 medium head escarole (about 1 pound)
1 medium Granny Smith apple (7 to 8 ounces)
1 small celery root (about 1/2 pound; see p. 80 for more about celery root)
1/2 cup pecan halves, toasted**

In a small bowl, whisk the vinegar, shallot, mustard, salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Let the mixture stand for 10 minutes and then whisk in the olive oil. Add 2 tablespoons of the crumbled blue cheese and stir gently.

Remove any tough, discolored, or broken outer leaves from the escarole. Trim off the root end with a sharp knife. Tear the leaves into bite-size pieces, wash well, and spin dry thoroughly (you should have about 6 lightly packed cups). Store in a large serving bowl covered with a slightly damp towel in the refrigerator until ready to toss. (If storing for more than an hour, cover the towel-covered bowl with plastic wrap to prevent the towel from drying out.)

Up to 1 hour before serving the salad, peel, core, and dice the apple into 1/4-inch cubes (you should have about 1 1/4 cups). Reserve the apple in a medium bowl. Slice the thick skin from the celery root and dice it the same size as the apple (you should have about 1 1/2 cups). Add the celery root to the diced apple and toss with 2 tablespoons of the vinaigrette to prevent discoloration. Cover and refrigerate until ready



The flavors of this salad come together best when it's allowed to sit for 10 or 15 minutes before serving.

to toss the salad. (Don't soak the apple or celery root in water to prevent browning—you'll ruin their flavor and texture.)

Ten minutes before serving the salad, toss the escarole and the apple and celery root mixture with the remaining dressing. Break up the pecans into the salad and toss again to incorporate. Season to taste with salt and pepper. (The blue cheese will add a little saltiness, so take care not to oversalt the salad.) Crumble the remaining blue cheese over the salad just before serving.

food science

Storing greens

Preserving the quality of lettuce and other leafy greens depends on striking a balance between too little and too much moisture. For short-term storage, the more pressing concern is too little moisture, which quickly causes leaves to dehydrate and wilt. A moist environment can be created inside a sealed plastic bag; that, coupled with cold storage

(40°F), slows dehydration so the plant tissue remains juicy and crisp. Maria Helm Sinskey's suggestion to add a slightly damp paper towel to the bag is helpful because the towel adds extra humidity, but don't make the towel too damp. Too much moisture in the bag can promote decay, especially if the lettuce is stored for more than a few days.

—Linda J. Harris, Ph.D.

Winter Greens with Black Olive Vinaigrette & Warm Marinated Goat Cheese Croutons

Serves eight.

- 2 logs ($\frac{1}{4}$ pound each) fresh goat cheese
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves, lightly chopped
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 8 slices ($\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick) baguette or thin Italian loaf, cut on the diagonal
- 1 large clove garlic, cut in half lengthwise
- 6 lightly packed cups of bite-size chicory and escarole (or other winter greens of your choice)
- 1 large Belgian endive (about $\frac{1}{2}$ pound)
- Black Olive Vinaigrette** (see the recipe at right)
- Sea salt or kosher salt

Up to one week ahead: Cut each goat cheese log into four equal rounds, using a thin, sharp knife dipped in hot water. Arrange the rounds in one layer in a nonreactive container. Pour $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of olive oil evenly over the cheese. Sprinkle with the thyme and grind on some pepper over the cheese. Cover and marinate for at least 2 hours in the refrigerator. (The cheese can be marinated for up to a week ahead in the refrigerator.) Remove the cheese from the refrigerator 30 minutes before tossing the salad.

Up to three days ahead: Heat the oven to 350°F. Rub the sliced bread all over with the cut sides of the garlic clove. Spread the bread slices out on a heavy baking sheet and drizzle with the remaining 2 teaspoons olive oil. Put the sheet in the oven and toast the bread (without turning) until the edges are lightly golden and the bread is crisp, 10 to 12 minutes. Let the toasts cool on a rack. (These may be made up to three days ahead and, once completely cool, stored in a plastic bag at room temperature.)

Wash the chicory and escarole and spin dry well. Store covered with a slightly damp towel in the refrigerator until ready to use.



Just before serving: Trim off the brown root end from the endive and cut the endive crosswise into 1-inch-thick crescents. Use your fingers to separate the leaves. Discard the firm rounds of core. Toss the endive with the chicory and escarole.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Put the croutons on a rimmed baking sheet and lay one round of cheese on each crouton. Use a knife to spread the cheese so that it completely covers the bread and drizzle the olive oil marinade over the croutons. Put the baking sheet in the oven for 5 minutes to heat the goat cheese.

While the croutons are warming, set aside about $2\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons of the vinaigrette and toss the salad with the remaining vinaigrette. Season the salad with salt and pepper to taste.

Remove the croutons from the oven and dab a bit of the reserved vinaigrette on top of each. Serve the salad on individual plates with one crouton alongside.

Black Olive Vinaigrette

Yields scant 1 cup.

Because of the saltiness of the anchovies and olives, no other salt is necessary in this vinaigrette. The vinaigrette tastes best when prepared at least one day in advance.

- 3 anchovy fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon red-wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons minced shallots
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- Freshly ground black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup pitted Niçoise or Kalamata olives, finely chopped

2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

In a small bowl, whisk the anchovies with the lemon juice, vinegar, shallots, and garlic; season with pepper. Let the mixture sit for 10 minutes and then add the olives and parsley and whisk in the olive oil. Store in the refrigerator overnight. Before using, bring the vinaigrette to room temperature and whisk again.

Maria Helm Sinskey is the author of *In the Vineyard Kitchen: Menus Inspired by the Seasons.* ♦

A Trifle of Chocolate, Cherries & Cream

Layer the flavors of a Black Forest cake for this showstopping make-ahead dessert

BY ELINOR KLIBANS

There's a funny story behind this trifle—well, actually, a fortunate accident. I was getting ready to frost a chocolate cake when I dropped it on the counter and it broke into several pieces. My still delicious but no longer very attractive cake needed a new and creative plan. Luckily, inspiration struck—I decided to turn my cake into a trifle.

Cake, fruit, syrup, and whipped cream—that's all there is to it. In England, trifles are traditionally made with slices of sherry-soaked sponge cake, which are spread with jam and vanilla pastry cream and then layered in a large bowl. But the basic idea of layering cake and fillings in a bowl is really just a jumping off point for many variations. My favorite is a Black Forest trifle—a layered twist on the famous cake that combines cherries and chocolate—which starts with a simple chocolate cake. I brush the cake with a mixture of the syrup from canned cherries



Making a Black Forest Trifle

What you'll need

Serves sixteen.

A 2½- to 3-quart glass bowl or trifle bowl

FOR THE CAKE:

2 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped
1 ounce unsweetened chocolate, chopped
5 ounces (1 cup plus 2 tablespoons)
 unbleached all-purpose flour
½ ounce (2 tablespoons) unsweetened
 Dutch-process cocoa powder
½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon table salt
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) unsalted butter;
 softened at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ cup sour cream
⅓ cup strong brewed coffee

FOR THE CHERRIES AND KIRSCH SYRUP:

15- or 16-ounce can pitted sweet cherries
 in heavy or extra-heavy syrup
¼ cup kirsch (cherry brandy)
Granulated sugar to taste

FOR THE WHIPPED CREAM:

3 cups cold heavy cream
½ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon kirsch

FOR ASSEMBLING THE TRIFLE:

1 cup semisweet chocolate shavings (from
 a 3- to 4-ounce block of chocolate; see
 From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74)



Make the cake up to one day ahead

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter the bottom and sides of a 9x2-inch round cake pan. Line the bottom of the pan with parchment and butter the parchment.

Fill a medium skillet with about ½ inch water and heat until just below a simmer. Put both the semisweet and unsweetened chocolate in a medium heatproof bowl and put the bowl in the barely simmering water. Stir until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Remove from the water bath and let cool slightly.

Sift together the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. In an electric mixer (use the paddle attachment), beat the butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, 2 to 4 minutes. Mix in the slightly cooled melted chocolate on low speed just until incorporated. Increase the speed to medium and add the eggs one



Which cherries?

We taste-tested frozen, jarred, and canned cherries to see which had the best flavor, and the canned version won hands down. Look for cherries labeled "in heavy syrup" or "in extra heavy syrup". (Some canned cherries come in fruit juice concentrate, which doesn't have quite the same flavor or texture and will give you a different result.)

and cherry brandy—this really intensifies the flavor of the trifle. A generous amount of lofty whipped cream and the cherries themselves serve as the other layers of the trifle.

Assemble in a glass bowl, spreading each layer to the edge. Once you've made the components of the trifle, putting it together is simply a matter of brushing the cake with the syrup and layering it, along with the cherries and whipped cream, in a pretty bowl. A glass bowl is always a good choice for serving, because it looks festive and allows guests to see the different trifle layers. I use a classic trifle bowl (for sources, see p. 84) but a regular 2½- to 3-quart bowl is fine. Be sure to spread each layer to the edge of the bowl; this way, the layers and colors will be clearly visible. The white whipped cream looks stunning against the dark chocolate cake.

For the best flavor, make it ahead. A trifle benefits from being prepared in advance; this allows the flavors to come together. So make your trifle a few hours ahead and leave it in the refrigerator to rest. You can also make the cake and syrup up to a day ahead. Just wrap the cake and keep it at room temperature, and cover and refrigerate the syrup.

Serving a trifle to a crowd is easy. Set out the bowl with a big spoon and let your guests help themselves. Digging through all those layers and taking as much as you want is about as fun as dessert can get.



at a time, beating well after each addition. Scrape the bowl, add the vanilla, and beat on medium speed for another 1 minute. On low speed, mix in the sour cream just until it's incorporated. Add the flour mixture (in three additions), alternating with the coffee (in two additions); scrape the bowl as needed. The batter will be very thick, like chocolate mousse or frosting.

Scrape the cake batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top. Bake until the top feels firm and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 35 minutes. The cake may sink a bit in the center, but that's fine. Let the cake cool for 20 minutes in the baking pan on a wire rack. Using a small, sharp knife, loosen the sides of the cake from the pan, invert the cake onto the rack, and discard the paper liner. Let cool completely.



Prepare the cherries and kirsch syrup up to one day ahead

Drain the cherries in a colander set over a large bowl (to catch the syrup) for 30 minutes. Reserve 1/2 cup of the syrup. Transfer the cherries to a small bowl, drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the kirsch, and set aside. Taste the syrup; it should be slightly tart and not too sweet. If necessary, stir in 1 to 2 teaspoons sugar. Put the syrup in a small saucepan and simmer over medium heat until reduced by about half, about 3 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the remaining 3 tablespoons kirsch. Set aside to cool.



Make the whipped cream just before assembly

Put the cream, sugar, and kirsch in the large bowl of an electric mixer and whip on high speed until it holds firm peaks.



Assemble the trifle up to six hours ahead

Pick out the ten best-looking cherries and blot them dry with paper towels. With a long, serrated knife, cut the cooled cake vertically (all the way across the cake; see the photo at left) into 1/2-inch slices. Line the bottom of a 2 1/2- to 3-quart glass bowl or trifle bowl with about a third of the cake slices to create an even layer. Don't worry if the pieces break, as long as they fill in the spaces. Brush this layer of cake lightly with some of the kirsch syrup, top with a third of the whipped cream, and randomly nestle half of the remaining cherries into the cream. Sprinkle with a third of the chocolate shavings. Repeat with two more layers. On the top layer of cream, arrange the best-looking cherries in a ring near the rim of the bowl and scatter the chocolate shavings inside the cherry ring. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes and up to 6 hours. Serve chilled.

Elinor Klivans is the author of several cookbooks, including Fearless Baking, and the forthcoming Big Fat Cookies and Cupcakes. ♦



Filled with sun-dried tomatoes, mozzarella, olives, and salami, this stuffed chicken breast is reminiscent of Italian antipasto.

Crisp Coating, Moist Chicken, Flavorful Fillings

BY JENNIFER C. MARTINKUS & DERRIN DAVIS

If you're searching for something to serve to company that's easy to prepare, that everyone will like, and that feels a little special, look no further than stuffed chicken breasts. They're perfect for casual weekend dinners, and once you get the hang of the technique, you can manage it on a weeknight, too.

The method we use isn't fussy, and it ensures a crisp golden crust, moist meat, and cheesy, bold flavors in each bite. You start by making the filling, which can be as simple as a slice of prosciutto and some grated Fontina. Then you cut a pocket into the side of the breast and stuff in the filling. The breasts then get breaded, pan-fried to create a golden brown crust, and baked in the oven to finish cooking. The breading helps protect the meat as it bakes, and the result is a truly moist chicken breast.

We offer four diverse filling recipes on p. 63, but one of the great things about chicken is that it goes with almost anything. Once you've made these recipes a few times, you'll prob-

ably want to try your own filling ideas. When that time comes, here are a few tips to guide you:

Keep the filling flavors intense but simple. Just a few ingredients can have a big impact. Choosing bold ingredients like capers, sun-dried tomatoes, Parmesan, sautéed shallots or garlic, mustard, and herbs will contribute strong flavors without a lot of fuss.

Include some cheese. We find that cheese in the filling adds a moist, creamy texture. Cheeses like mozzarella, Fontina, and Cheddar have a gorgeous oozy quality when the breast is sliced, and crumbly cheeses like feta and goat cheese get more creamy than melty.

You can spice up the breading. The master method on p. 62 uses a classic breading technique: dredge in flour, then eggs, then breadcrumbs. We often spike the eggs or breadcrumbs with other flavors. Try herbs, spices, citrus zest, or grated hard cheese in the crumbs; or add a dash of mustard or chile sauce to the eggs.



The simplest of fillings:
**thin slices of prosciutto and
grated Fontina. (For more
combinations, see p. 63.)**

Stuffed Chicken Breasts

Serves four.

These stuffed chicken breasts can be assembled and refrigerated for up to three hours before cooking.

4 large boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (8 to 9 ounces each)
Filling recipe of your choice (at right)
¾ cup unbleached all-purpose flour
2 large eggs
1½ cups fresh breadcrumbs (see p. 72)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
⅔ cup olive oil

If the chicken breasts have tenderloins, remove them. Trim, rinse, and pat the breasts dry.

1 Make a pocket on the thicker side of each breast: Using a sharp boning or utility knife, cut into the breast about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from one end. Create a pocket, slicing to within about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the other side.

2 Stuff each breast with about one-quarter of the filling, distributing it evenly throughout the pocket and to the ends. Press on the top of each breast to close the pocket.

Line up three wide shallow dishes. Fill the first with the flour. In the second, whisk the eggs. In the third, toss the breadcrumbs with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper.

3 Season the breasts generously on both sides with salt and pepper. Dredge one breast well in the flour, shaking off any excess. Dip it into the eggs, turning to coat evenly, and then dredge it in the breadcrumbs, pressing to make the crumbs adhere evenly. Gently shake off any excess. Set on a plate and repeat with the other breasts. Refrigerate for at least 5 minutes and up to 3 hours to let the breading set. Discard any leftover flour, egg, or crumbs.

Heat the oven to 350°F .

4 Heat the olive oil in a heavy 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. When the oil is very hot, carefully add two of the breasts to the pan and cook until golden brown, about 3 minutes per side. If the oil seems to get too hot, reduce the heat to medium. Transfer the breasts to a baking sheet. Repeat with the other two breasts.

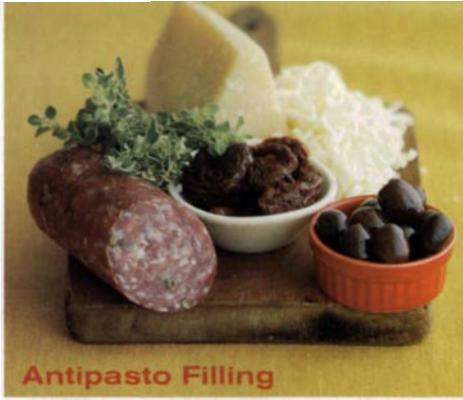
5 Bake until the chicken and filling reach 165°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 15 minutes. Serve immediately.

5 steps to moist, crisp chicken breasts



Tool tip:

A slotted spatula is the best tool for turning and moving the chicken. Tongs can damage the delicate golden crust.



Antipasto Filling

This filling tastes remarkably like a classic Italian restaurant pizza topping. It can be made a day ahead.

1½ cups grated whole-milk mozzarella (6 ounces)
3 tablespoons chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes
3 tablespoons chopped pitted Kalamata olives
¼ cup very finely diced salami
2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
2 teaspoons chopped fresh oregano leaves
Freshly ground black pepper

In a small bowl, mix the mozzarella, sun-dried tomatoes, olives, salami, Parmigiano, oregano, and a few grinds of pepper. Follow the recipe for Stuffed Chicken Breasts at left.

Serving suggestion: Pasta simply tossed with olive oil, garlic, and Parmigiano.



Prosciutto & Fontina Filling

You can complement the flavor of this filling by adding 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard to the eggs and 4 teaspoons dried sage leaves to the breadcrumbs.

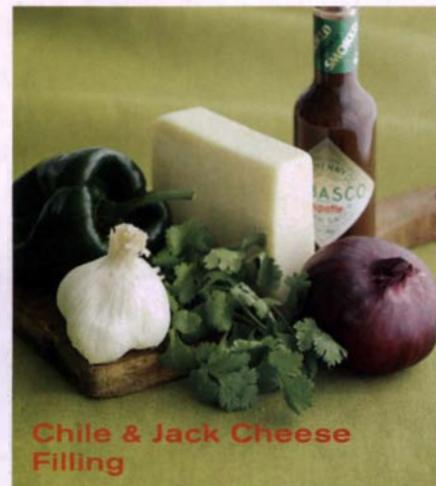
4 thin slices prosciutto (2 to 3 ounces)
1 cup lightly packed grated Fontina (3 ounces)

Follow the recipe for Stuffed Chicken Breasts at left, laying a slice of prosciutto along the length of the pocket before stuffing in the cheese.

Serving suggestions: Soft polenta topped with fresh herbs or fried polenta squares.

Simple combinations and bold flavors make irresistible fillings

Choose one of these filling recipes to use in the master recipe at far left. Each yields enough to stuff four chicken breast halves.



Chile & Jack Cheese Filling

If you live near a Mexican market, try substituting queso asadero or queso Oaxaca for the Monterey Jack. This filling can be made a day ahead.

2 tablespoons olive oil
1½ cups ¼-inch diced fresh poblano chiles (about 2 large chiles)
1 cup ¼-inch diced red onion (half a medium onion)
2 teaspoons minced garlic
1 teaspoon chipotle Tabasco sauce; more to taste
½ teaspoon ground cumin
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1½ cups grated Monterey Jack (5½ ounces)
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

Heat the olive oil in a large (preferably 12-inch) skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chiles and onion. Cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are quite soft and somewhat browned, 7 to 9 minutes. Immediately stir in the garlic, chipotle Tabasco, cumin, salt, and pepper. Remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature. Stir in the cheese and cilantro. Follow the recipe for Stuffed Chicken Breasts at far left.

Serving suggestion: Long-grain white rice tossed with fresh cilantro and parsley.



Spinach & Goat Cheese Filling

The rich, sharp flavor of goat cheese blends perfectly with the sweet richness of shallots. This filling can be made a day ahead.

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup finely chopped shallots (6 to 8 medium shallots)
8 ounces fresh spinach, stemmed and chopped (7 lightly packed cups)
¼ cup dry white wine
3½ ounces fresh goat cheese, crumbled
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium to medium-low heat. Add the shallots and cook slowly until softened and aromatic, 8 to 10 minutes. Increase the heat to medium and add the spinach (in batches, if necessary) and wine. Cook, stirring frequently, until the spinach is wilted and all the liquid has evaporated, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the goat cheese, salt, and pepper. Let cool to room temperature. Follow the recipe for Stuffed Chicken Breasts at far left.

Serving suggestion: Roasted, herbed red potatoes.

Jennifer C. Martinkus is a food writer, and Derrin Davis is a chef at Bay House in Lincoln City, Oregon. ♦

Make the Most of a

A flavorful mushroom sauté can be a delicious side dish—or the base for a pasta, a gratin, or a savory tart

BY LYNNE SAMPSON

Where I live in the mountains of eastern Oregon, edible mushrooms grow in the woods right outside my back door. But when I want mushrooms I can count on, I head for the supermarket. I buy what I've come to think of as everyday mushrooms—white button, cremini, and shiitake—and use those supermarket varieties to make a mushroom sauté that has great flavors and texture. On its own, my sauté is a terrific side dish for pork chops, steak, or chicken. What's also great is that the same mushroom sauté can be a springboard for lots of other easy recipes, like a mushroom and Fontina tart, a potato and mushroom gratin, and a pasta dish with mushrooms, peas, and prosciutto (see the recipes on pp. 66–67).

I cook everyday mushrooms exactly the way I do exotic ones: I sauté them over steady heat long enough to cook out their moisture and then let them brown to intensify their flavors. This two-step approach creates the most flavorful sauté.

Cook out the moisture. The reason so many mushrooms sautés are bland is that the mushrooms haven't had sufficient time to release much of the water they contain. A wide skillet and medium heat encourage rapid evaporation, and salting early draws out their moisture. I also add garlic when there's still liquid in the pan because the mushrooms absorb all of that delicious flavor.

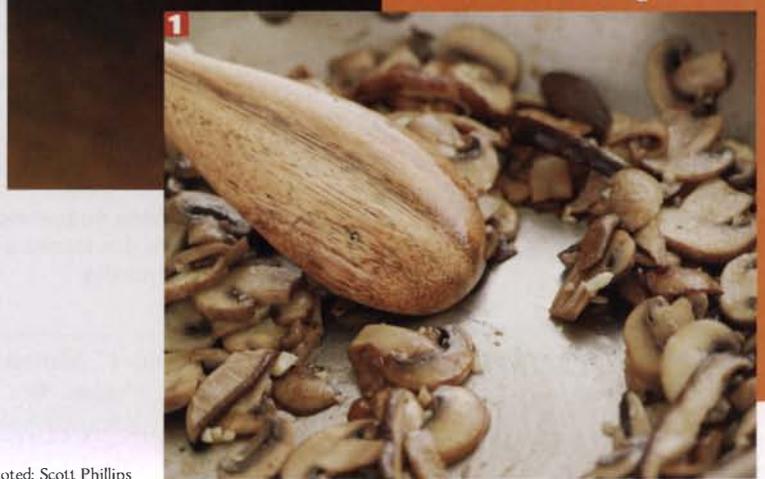
Brown to intensify flavors. Another reason a mushroom sauté can be bland is that the mushrooms haven't been browned enough. So, once the liquid has evaporated and the mushrooms have shrunk down in the pan, I crank up the heat. Since browning is what creates deep flavor, it's important to let the mushrooms sit and brown. You'll

be tempted to stir them often—resist. I take the pan off the heat when the mushrooms are still glossy but before they start to shrivel, tossing in fresh herbs and seasoning to taste, depending on the final recipe. Their rich and savory flavor is anything but everyday.



This versatile sauté combines shiitake, cremini, and white button mushrooms.

Two steps to



Mushroom Sauté



Mushroom Sauté

Serves four as a side dish.

**1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 pound mixed fresh mushrooms (I like to use 4 ounces shiitakes and 6 ounces each cremini and white mushrooms), washed, trimmed, and sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, to yield 5½ to 6 cups (see the sidebar at right)
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
Freshly ground black pepper
2 to 3 tablespoons heavy cream, broth, or lemon juice (optional)
Additional chopped herbs (optional)**

Heat the oil and butter in a 12-inch sauté pan or skillet over medium heat until the butter foams. Add the mushrooms and garlic. Like sponges, the mushrooms will immediately absorb all the fat in the pan. Sprinkle with the salt and stir with a wooden spoon until the mushrooms start to release their mois-

ture and begin to shrink, 2 to 3 minutes. Increase the heat to medium high so that you hear a steady sizzle; stir occasionally. In about 5 minutes, when the liquid evaporates and the mushrooms start to brown, give just an occasional sweep with the spoon (about once a minute) to allow the mushrooms to brown nicely, cooking them another 2 to 4 minutes.

Resist the inclination to stir too often. Turn off the heat and toss the mushrooms with the parsley and pepper to taste, adding more salt if needed. Be prudent with salt if you're using the sauté in one of the offshoot recipes (see pp. 66–67.) If serving as a side dish, stir in a few tablespoons cream, broth, or lemon juice to moisten the mushrooms and to deglaze the pan, scraping the browned bits off the bottom of the pan into the mushroom mixture. Add other herbs (like thyme, sage, and chives) if you like.



Yes, you can wash mushrooms

I recommend washing fresh mushrooms, rather than wiping them clean. Washing is actually quicker and less tedious than wiping, and the grit the mushrooms leave behind is impressive. Plus, any moisture will be released in cooking. Simply fill a large bowl with water. Plunge the mushrooms in for a moment, swirl them around, and then lift them out, drain them in a strainer, and pat them dry if you like.

Trimming mushrooms is simple. For cremini and white button mushrooms, simply trim the very ends of the stems; leave the rest on. For shiitake mushrooms, remove and discard the whole stem, which is tough and dry. —L.S.

maximum mushroom flavor

2

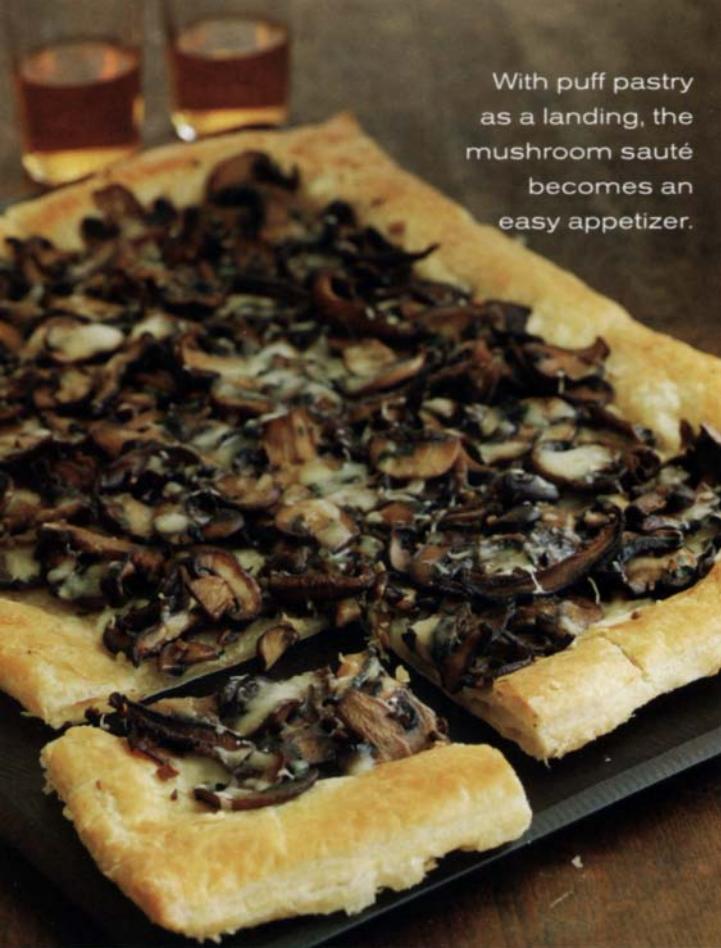


Cook out the moisture

1 Concentrate the flavor by allowing enough time for the mushrooms to release all of their water.

Brown for deep flavor

2 Crank up the heat to brown them, and resist the inclination to stir too much.



With puff pastry as a landing, the mushroom sauté becomes an easy appetizer.

Mushroom-Fontina Tart

Serves eight as an appetizer.

For reliable, ready-made frozen puff pastry, try Pepperidge Farm brand.

Mushroom Sauté (see the recipe on p. 65)

**1 sheet frozen puff pastry
All-purpose flour for dusting
1 egg, beaten
½ cup (1¾ ounces) finely grated Fontina**

While you prepare the mushroom sauté (skip the deglazing), thaw one sheet of frozen puff pastry at room temperature until pliable, 30 to 45 minutes. Set the sauté aside to cool.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F. Lightly dust a work surface with flour. Unfold the pastry sheet and roll it into a rectangle that's

about 10x15 inches and about ¼ inch thick. Slide it onto a baking sheet lined with parchment. With the exception of about an inch border around the rectangle, prick the pastry all over with a fork. With a pastry brush, brush the beaten egg over the border (you won't need all of it). Bake until the pastry begins to puff and the surface feels dry, about 5 minutes.

Scatter the mushroom sauté onto the pastry, leaving the inch or so border uncovered. Bake until the crust border is puffed and deeply golden brown, about 10 minutes. Scatter the cheese over the mushrooms and continue baking until the cheese melts, another 2 to 3 minutes. Let cool briefly on a rack before slicing and serving.

Mushroom & Potato Gratin

Serves eight to ten as a side dish.

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened at room temperature

Mushroom Sauté (see the recipe on p. 65)

1 cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth

1 cup heavy cream

2½ pounds russet potatoes

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme leaves

2½ teaspoons kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

½ cup (about 2 ounces) finely grated Gruyère

Heat the oven to 375°F and butter a 9x13-inch baking dish with the softened butter.

Prepare the mushroom sauté, using the optional deglazing liquid if you like. Transfer the mushrooms to a bowl and return the pan to medium-high heat. Pour in the broth and scrape the pan with a wooden spoon until most of the cooked-on bits are released into the broth. Combine the broth

with the cream in a measuring cup with a spout.

Peel and slice the potatoes very thinly (about ⅛ inch). In a large bowl, toss the sliced potatoes with the thyme, salt, and several grinds of pepper. Overlap half of the potato slices in two even layers to cover the bottom of the buttered baking dish. Distribute the mushrooms over the potatoes. Cover the mushrooms with two more overlapping layers of the remaining potato slices. Pour the broth and cream mixture over the potatoes. Sprinkle the cheese evenly over the top.

Cover the gratin with foil and bake it for 30 minutes. Uncover it and press the potatoes down with a spatula. Bake uncovered, rotating the pan occasionally for even browning, until the top is browned and the potatoes feel tender when poked with a fork, another 25 to 30 minutes. The cream will be gently bubbling. Let the gratin sit for about 15 minutes before serving.



The sauté can be tucked between thin slices of potatoes and baked with cream, chicken broth, and thyme.



Use the mushroom sauté to boost a main-dish pasta.

More ideas for a mushroom sauté...

- ❖ Tuck into a quiche, omelet, or frittata.
- ❖ Stir into cooked white, brown, or wild rice.
- ❖ Toss into kasha or a barley pilaf.
- ❖ Spoon over baked or grilled polenta and top with grated Parmigiano Reggiano.
- ❖ Add to sautéed green beans.
- ❖ Stir into simmered tomato sauce and toss with pasta.
- ❖ Add to chicken broth with rice noodles, ginger, and soy.



Pasta with Mushrooms, Peas, Prosciutto & Sour Cream

Serves two to three as a main course.

This recipe goes most quickly if you put the pasta water on while you make the mushroom sauté.

**1/4 pound thinly sliced prosciutto
1/2 cup sour cream
2 teaspoons all-purpose flour
Mushroom Sauté (see the recipe on p. 65)
Kosher salt
1/2 pound corkscrew-shaped dried pasta (cellentani or cavatappi)
1 cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth**

**1/2 cup frozen peas
2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
Freshly ground black pepper**

Cut the sliced prosciutto crosswise into slender pieces about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch wide. Stir together the sour cream and the flour. While you prepare the mushroom sauté, put a large pot of well-salted water on to boil. When the mushrooms have browned (use the optional deglazing step, if you like), transfer them to a plate. Don't wash the pan. Start cooking the pasta in the boiling water.

Return the mushroom pan to medium-high heat. Pour in the broth and

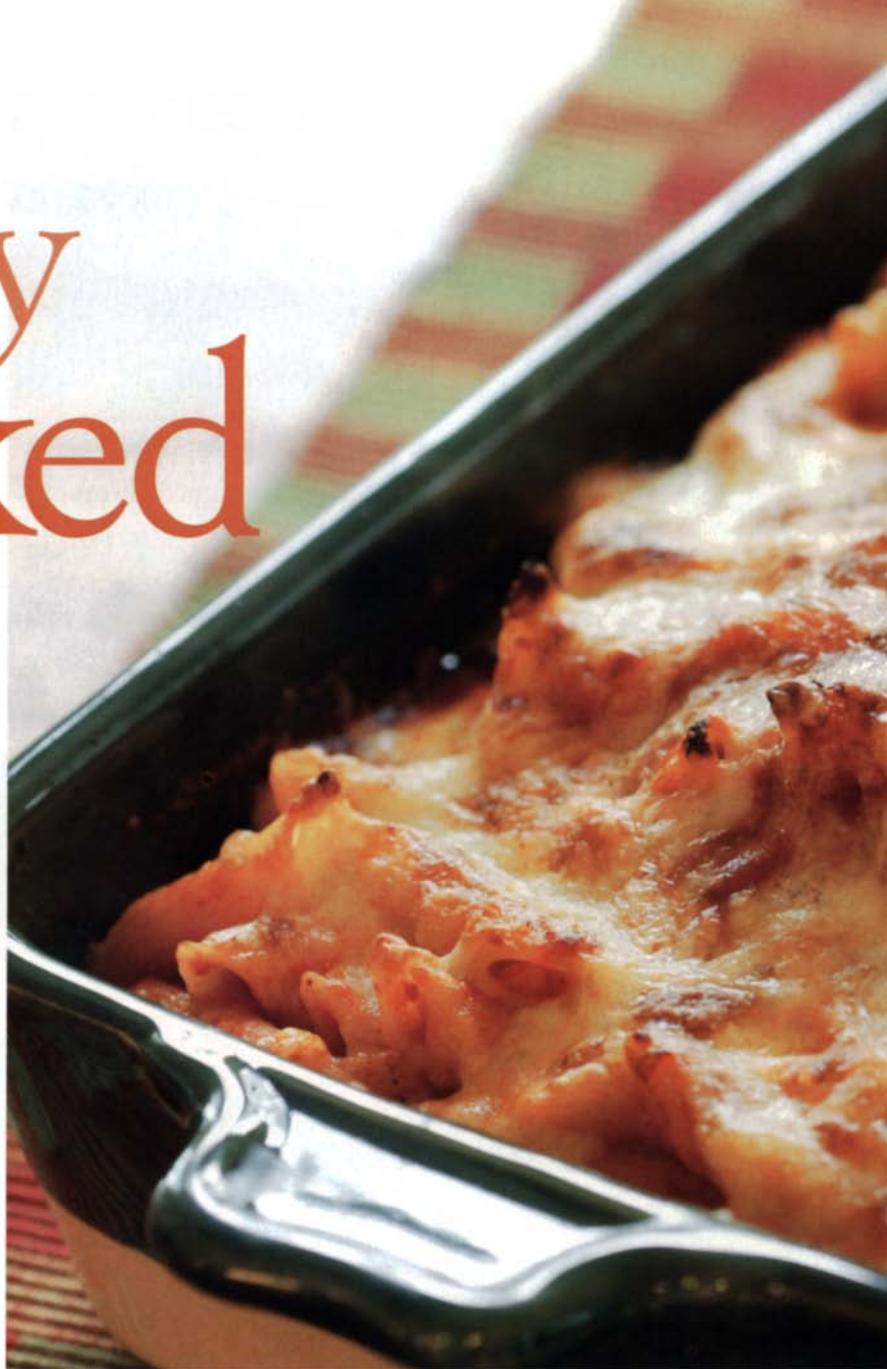
scrape the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to stir any browned bits into the broth. Boil until reduced to about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup, 2 to 3 minutes. Reduce the heat to a very gentle simmer and whisk in the sour cream. Stir in the peas and maintain a gentle simmer. When the pasta is just tender (consult the package for approximate timing), drain it and put it back in its pot. Stir the mushrooms and prosciutto into the sauce and let heat briefly, about half a minute. Toss the sauce and parsley into the pasta. Season to taste with pepper and serve in warmed pasta bowls.

Lynne Sampson is a cook and writer who lives in Joseph, Oregon. ♦

Hearty Baked Pasta

Follow an easy formula—and use your favorite pantry staples—to create delicious, warming baked pastas that are great for a crowd

BY TONY ROSENFELD



The six months I spent working in a Roman restaurant kitchen gave me both a wonderfully colorful Italian vocabulary and an appreciation for Italian cooking's basic techniques. The cooks at the restaurant rarely used measuring spoons or specific recipes. Instead, they prepared almost every dish by following a traditional method they had been taught and then added their own personal touches along the way.

I've assimilated this easy-going approach into the way I cook. There are times to be exact, and others when a basic method and a little creativity will suffice. Baked pasta is an example of the latter. I love to make baked pasta in the cold winter months, especially with a lot of friends and family around during the holidays. But I never make the exact same version twice. By

sticking to the method but varying my ingredients, I get a different delicious dish each time.

The formula for baked pasta is quite simple. To start, make a quick sauce while the pasta cooks. Once both are done, toss them together with some vegetables if you like, top with cheese (and perhaps some bread-crumbs), and then brown in a hot oven. In a short time, you'll have a hearty dish with a golden brown, melted crust that blankets a warming mix of pasta, vegetables, and meats.

A quick braise becomes a flavorful sauce. After browning your choice of flavor bases—meats, mushrooms, or onions (or a combination)—make a sauce by adding a liquid. This liquid can be puréed canned tomatoes (and some cream, if you like) or a mixture



One of the simplest combinations: penne with tomato, rosemary, and three cheeses

of chicken broth and cream. Simmer the sauce until it intensifies slightly in both flavor and texture. Then stir in sauce enhancers—pantry ingredients like red chile flakes and balsamic vinegar. Try for a balance of flavors and textures, allowing common sense and your own preferences to guide you.

Undercook the pasta slightly and bake with high heat. One great pitfall of baked pasta is that it can get overly soft while baking. To counteract this problem, cook the pasta (I like small, sturdy shapes that will hold their texture nicely) slightly less than you normally might, until it's just barely tender to the tooth. This ensures that the pasta doesn't overcook during baking. Also, baking at a high heat—450°F—will cook the dish quickly and keep the mixture tasting fresh and light.

The formula:
Up to 2 flavor bases



1 to 2 cloves garlic



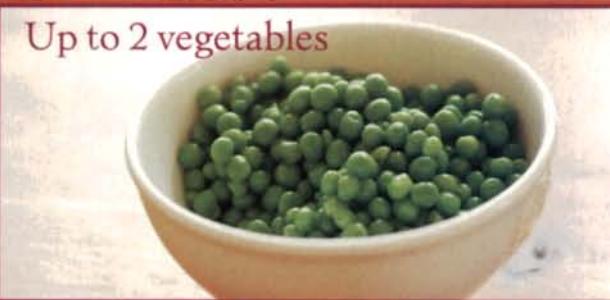
Tomato purée or broth and cream



2 or 3 sauce enhancers



Up to 2 vegetables



1 pound pasta



12 ounces cheese



creating a baked pasta

Serves six.

1

Get ready to cook.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F. Put a large pot with 6 quarts water and 2 tablespoons kosher salt on to boil. Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Read the method from start to finish and gather your ingredients before you start cooking.

Make-ahead tip

If you want to do some of the cooking ahead, make the sauce a day in advance and then reheat it and proceed with the method at step 5.



2

Brown the flavor bases one at a time.

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a 6- to 8-quart Dutch oven or heavy-based pot over medium-high heat. When the oil is shimmering, about 1 minute, add one of the flavor bases (see the list below) and ¼ teaspoon kosher salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until almost cooked through and nicely browned, about 5 to 10 minutes. If you're only using one flavor base, proceed to step 3. If you're using a second one, transfer the first to a bowl with a slotted spoon, add another 2 tablespoons olive oil to the pan, and brown the second flavor base as above.



3 Stir in 1 to 2 cloves minced garlic.

Using a spatula or wooden spoon, push the contents of the Dutch oven to the side. If the pan is dry, add 1 tablespoon oil, and then the garlic and cook until it just starts to sizzle and becomes fragrant, about 10 seconds.

Flavor bases

Choose up to two, for a total of 1 pound:

- ❖ **Mushrooms:** cut into ¼-inch slices (I use white button mushrooms but any kind will work)
- ❖ **Sausage:** removed from its casing and crumbled or broken into ¾-inch pieces (I use sweet Italian sausage, but hot is fine)
- ❖ **Chicken:** boneless, skinless thighs—trimmed of fat and cut into ¾-inch pieces
- ❖ **Yellow onion:** halved and thinly sliced



4 Add the liquid and simmer.

If you've set aside any browned flavor bases, return them to the pan. Add the liquid (choose one from the list below), plus 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce to a gentle simmer, and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, so that the sauce thickens slightly.

Liquids

Choose one:

- ❖ Tomatoes: two 28-ounce cans whole tomatoes, drained of 1 cup of their combined juices and then puréed in a blender or food processor
- ❖ Tomatoes and cream: two 28-ounce cans whole tomatoes, drained of 1 cup of their combined juices and then puréed in a blender or food processor, plus 1/2 cup heavy cream
- ❖ Broth and cream: 1 1/2 cups low-salt chicken broth plus 1 cup heavy cream



5 Stir in the sauce enhancers.

Add two or three ingredients from the list below and cook until they're heated through and their flavors have melded, about 5 minutes. Taste for salt and pepper.

Sauce enhancers

Choose two or three:

- ❖ Sherry or balsamic vinegar: 2 tablespoons
- ❖ Olives: 1/4 cup pitted and coarsely chopped (I prefer Kalamata, but any kind will work)
- ❖ Oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes: 1/4 cup drained and thinly sliced
- ❖ Red chile flakes: 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon
- ❖ One coarsely chopped fresh herb, such as:
 - basil (1/4 cup)
 - flat-leaf parsley (1/4 cup)
 - rosemary (1 tablespoon)
 - thyme leaves (1 tablespoon)



6 Meanwhile, cook the pasta.

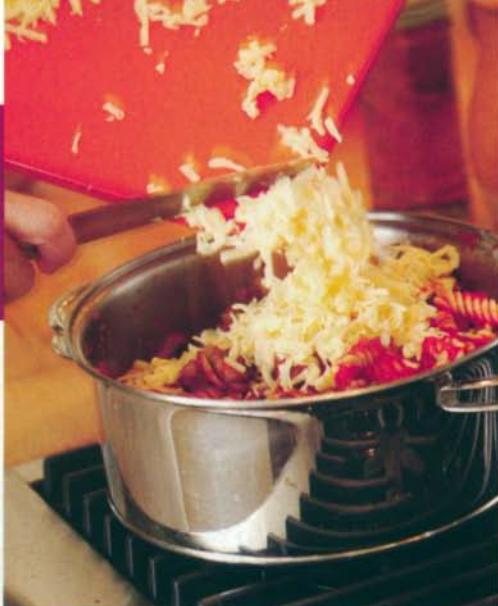
Cook the pasta in the boiling salted water until it's just tender to the tooth, about 10 minutes. Note: Cook the pasta a little less than you normally might because it will cook more in the oven later.

Pastas

Use 1 pound dried:

- ❖ Campanelle
- ❖ Farfalle
- ❖ Fusilli
- ❖ Gemelli
- ❖ Orecchiette
- ❖ Penne rigate
- ❖ Rigatoni
- ❖ Ziti

Continued...



7 Add the pasta and vegetables to the sauce.

Drain the pasta and add it to the sauce, along with your choice of vegetables (see the options below).

Vegetables

Choose up to two, 8 ounces each:

- ❖ Baby spinach
- ❖ Frozen peas
- ❖ Cauliflower: steamed or boiled until barely tender (1½-inch florets)
- ❖ Asparagus: steamed or boiled until barely tender (1-inch pieces)
- ❖ Broccoli: steamed or boiled until barely tender (1½-inch florets)

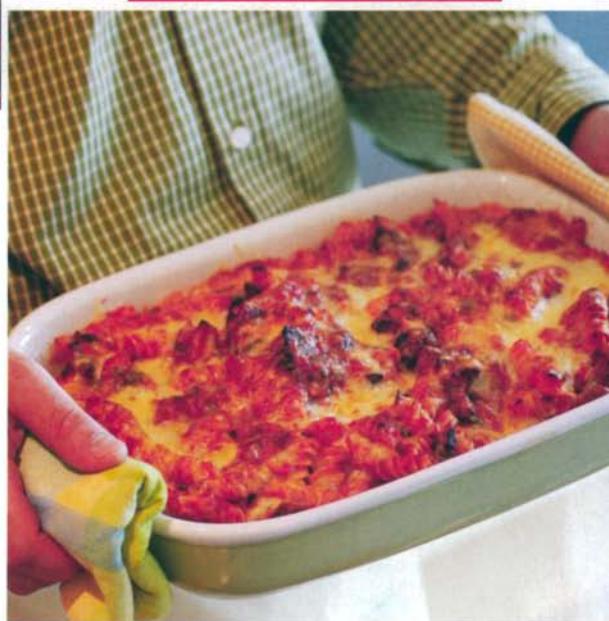
8 Add half of the cheese.

Add 6 ounces of the cheese (see the list below for options) to the pasta mixture and toss well. Transfer to the baking dish and spread evenly.

Cheese

Choose two or three and combine (for a total of 12 ounces), shredded or crumbled

- ❖ Fontina
- ❖ Mozzarella
- ❖ Parmigiano Reggiano or Pecorino Romano, freshly and finely grated
- ❖ Gruyère
- ❖ Gorgonzola (use no more than 4 ounces)



9 Top and bake.

Top the pasta with the remaining cheese and then the breadcrumbs (see the box above), if you like. Bake until the cheese is golden brown and the breadcrumbs (if using) are crisp, about 15 minutes. Let rest for 10 minutes before serving.

Tony Rosenfeld is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

My favorite combinations

Baked Penne with Tomato, Rosemary & Three Cheeses
(canned tomatoes, red chile flakes, rosemary, Fontina, Parmigiano, mozzarella)

Baked Rotini with Chicken, Asparagus & Sun-Dried Tomatoes
(chicken, chicken broth, cream, sherry vinegar, sun-dried tomatoes, basil, asparagus, Pecorino, mozzarella, breadcrumbs)

Baked Rigatoni with Cauliflower in a Spicy Pink Sauce (canned tomatoes, cream, red chile flakes, parsley, cauliflower, Parmigiano, Fontina)

Baked Orecchiette with Sausage, Spinach & Thyme
(sausage, chicken broth, cream, balsamic vinegar, thyme, baby spinach, Parmigiano, Fontina, mozzarella, breadcrumbs)

Baked Ziti with Peas & Browned Onions
(onions, chicken broth, cream, sherry vinegar, peas, Parmigiano, Gorgonzola, mozzarella, breadcrumbs)

Breadcrumbs

(optional)—½ cup:

I like to use coarse fresh breadcrumbs (good crusty bread pulsed in a food processor and seasoned with a large pinch of salt and a few grinds of pepper). Panko, Japanese breadcrumbs (p. 84), are a wonderful easy substitute.

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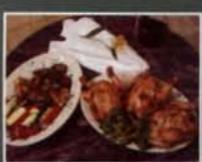
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BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

With so many occasions for special meals, the winter holidays can be a crazy-busy time for cooks. To help you sail smoothly through every meal, we've packed this edition of From Our Test Kitchen with lots of tips and techniques, like strategies for working with phyllo dough, new ways to use your peeler, and the best way to check if the potatoes are done. If you want to pull out all the stops, try our technique for dry-aging and roasting beef. For an investment of a little time and not much effort, you'll be rewarded with an amazing roast beef that's sure to convince your guests that you're a culinary genius.



Peelers aren't just for peeling

In the test kitchen, we don't just use peelers for trimming vegetables; we also shave and thinly slice foods like hard cheeses, summer squashes, small potatoes, and chocolate.

To make the shaved fennel for the Smoked Salmon Rolls on p. 90c, trim and cut a fennel bulb into quarters. Remove most of the core and then run your peeler down one of the cut sides. Keep shaving until you can no longer safely hold onto the piece of fennel. Toss extra fennel shavings into salads.

For the chocolate shavings needed to make the Black Forest Trifle on p. 58, run the peeler over the edge of a block of chocolate. For larger shavings and curls, warm the chocolate a bit, either by rubbing it with the palm of your hand or by microwaving it very briefly, about five seconds at a time. The warmer the chocolate, the larger the curls will be. To make it easier to grip and to keep your hand clean, you can hold the chocolate block with a paper towel.

Tips for working with phyllo dough

Tissue-thin sheets of phyllo dough can be frustrating to work with because they can dry out quickly and tear. Here are some tips for making your phyllo experience a happy one.

- ❖ Phyllo sheets thaw more evenly and are less likely to stick together if you let the unopened package thaw in the refrigerator overnight. You can keep unopened, thawed phyllo in the fridge for up to a month.
- ❖ Keep the phyllo covered when not working with it, and don't leave it uncovered for more than a minute at a time.
- ❖ Work as fast as you can.
- ❖ Use a soft-bristle pastry brush to lightly coat the sheets with melted butter or oil. Start at the edges (to keep them from cracking) and work in toward the center.
- ❖ Don't open the phyllo package until you have all the other ingredients prepared and you're ready to work.
- ❖ Unroll the phyllo sheets and lay them flat on a dry surface. Immediately cover with plastic wrap and then a damp towel. (Covering with just a damp towel will moisten the sheets and make them stick together.)
- ❖ Roll up any unused sheets, wrap well in plastic, and refrigerate for up to two weeks. Or, wrap in plastic and then foil to freeze for up to two months.



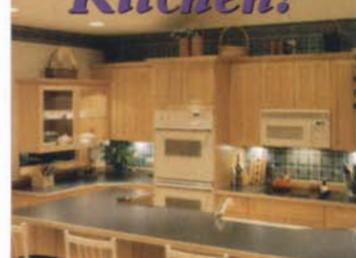
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Dry-aging beef pays off with big flavor

If you've had the good fortune of tasting dry-aged beef, then you know that it has a remarkable depth of flavor. Unfortunately for those of us who don't have a high-end butcher or serious steakhouse nearby, dry-aged beef can be hard to come by without involving FedEx and a big credit card charge. But the good news is that if you have a refrigerator, you can dry-age beef at home.

Why dry-aged beef tastes better

All fresh beef is aged for at least few days and up to several weeks to allow enzymes naturally present in the meat to break down the muscle tissue, resulting in improved texture and flavor. These days, most beef is aged in plastic shrink-wrap—a process known as wet-aging. Dry-aged beef, on the other hand, is exposed to air so dehydration can further concentrate the meat's flavor. It's a more expensive process than wet-aging,

however, because the meat loses weight from dehydration, and it also must be trimmed of its completely dried exterior.

We dry-aged a previously wet-aged boneless beef rib roast from our local market in one of our test kitchen refrigerators for three days. We had another rib roast from the same steer which we left in its plastic wrap to continue aging for the same amount of time. After roasting, we tasted them side by side. The dry-aged roast was more succulent and had a mellower yet beefier flavor than the wet-aged roast, which tasted watery by comparison. Next, we dry-aged another roast for seven days, and we were blown away by the flavor. Despite the loss of 20% of its original weight, we're convinced that for a truly special occasion, like a Christmas or New Year's dinner, dry-aged beef is worth the time and expense. To learn how to dry-age beef at home, turn to p. 78.

Horseradish-Chive Crème Fraîche

Yields about 1 cup.

This sauce is best made one day ahead and keeps well for a week. If you can't find crème fraîche, substitute $\frac{2}{3}$ cup sour cream and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup mayonnaise.

**1/4 cup prepared horseradish
1 1/2 tablespoons thinly sliced chives
8 ounces crème fraîche
Kosher salt to taste**

Stir the horseradish and chives into the crème fraîche. Season to taste with salt, cover, and refrigerate for at least 6 hours or until needed.

Dry-Aged Beef Rib Roast with a Mustard, Garlic & Thyme Crust

Serves eight.

If you lack the time or inclination to dry-age the beef, you can skip that step, though the roast won't be quite as delicious. (Start with a 4- to 4 1/2-pound roast if not dry-aging.)

**4 1/2- to 5-pound boneless beef rib roast
2 large cloves garlic
2 tablespoons kosher salt
2 tablespoons whole-grain Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon lightly chopped fresh thyme
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
Horseradish-Chive Crème Fraîche (at left) for serving**

Three to seven days ahead:
Dry-age the beef as described on p. 78 (steps one through three).

Roast the beef: Mince the garlic cloves with a chef's knife and sprinkle with the salt. Using the side of the knife, scrape and mash the garlic and salt together until they turn into a paste. In a small bowl, combine the garlic paste with the mustard, thyme, olive oil, and pepper. Trim the aged beef as described on p. 78 (step four) and rub the garlic mixture over all sides of the beef. Put the roast, fat side up, on a rack set in a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet or small roasting pan. Let sit at room temperature for 1 hour. Meanwhile, position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Roast the beef for 15 minutes. Without opening the door, reduce the oven temperature to 375°F. Continue to roast until a thermometer inserted in the center of the roast registers 130°F for medium rare, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

Let the beef rest for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, transfer the crème fraîche to a small serving dish. Carve the beef into thin or thick slices and pass the crème fraîche on the side.

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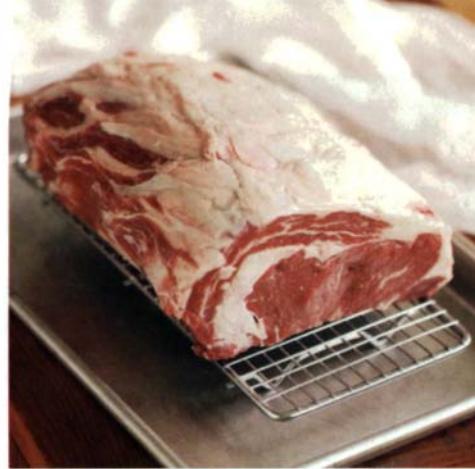
How to dry-age beef at home

ONE: Buy a prime or choice boneless beef rib or loin roast from the best meat source in your area.

TWO: Unwrap the beef, rinse it well, and pat it dry with paper towels. Do not trim. Wrap the roast loosely in a triple layer of cheesecloth and set it on a rack over a rimmed baking sheet or other tray.

THREE: Refrigerate for three to seven days; the longer the beef ages, the tastier it gets. After the first day, carefully unwrap and then rewrap with the same cheesecloth to keep the cloth fibers from sticking to the meat.

FOUR: When ready to roast, unwrap the meat and, with a sharp knife, shave off and discard the hard, dried outer layer of the meat. Shave away any dried areas of fat, too, but leave behind as much of the good fat as possible. Roast whole (see the recipe on p. 76) or cut into steaks.



BEFORE DRY-AGING



SEVEN DAYS LATER
(AND SIX OUNCES LIGHTER)

A food safety note

Home refrigerators aren't as consistent or as cold as commercial meat lockers. Before aging meat at home, get a refrigerator thermometer and be sure your fridge is set below 40°F. Cook or freeze the meat within seven days of beginning the dry-aging process.

equipment update

a new look for the Zyliss salad spinner



for the Zyliss salad spinner

In our review of salad spinners in *Fine Cooking* #57, the Zyliss spinner was the close runner-up to Oxo's pump version. Zyliss just introduced a new design that we took for a spin while testing the salad recipes on pp. 54–55, and we found a few improvements. A pull cord still spins the basket, but on the new model, the handle is much easier to grip, and the cord retracts automatically. The basket now spins in just one direction; it doesn't reverse as the cord retracts. We had liked that feature because it jostled the greens mid-spin, shaking out spots where moisture was trapped. But the new spinner has a brake that stops the basket at once, providing the same jostling effect.

But the new version's flat top is what sold us. You can store greens in the fridge in the spinner (a great way to keep them fresh) and easily stack other containers on top. Neither the Oxo nor the old Zyliss model can boast that. For sources, see p. 84. —*Maryellen Driscoll, editor at large*



tip: A fork or a skewer is better than a paring knife for testing the doneness of boiled potatoes. A knife's sharp tip cuts into the potato and can make it feel like it's more done than it really is. The slightly blunted tips of fork tines and skewers give a truer read.

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at the market

Looks like a softball, tastes like celery

What looks like a hairy softball and tastes like celery? It's a celery root, also known as celeriac, celery knob, or turnip-rooted celery. This funny-looking vegetable is a member of the celery family that's grown especially for its root, which tastes like a cross between celery and parsley and can be eaten raw or cooked. Try it raw—diced, shredded, or julienned—in salads like the one on p. 55. Try it cooked by adding it to a soup or stew, or for a delicious twist on mashed potatoes, replace up to half the potatoes with cubed celery root and boil together until both are tender.

When shopping, you might find celery root with its parsley-like leaves still attached; if so, they should look fresh, not wilted. Choose roots with no soft spots. To trim, cut off the leaves and the top and bottom of the root and then slice away the knobby skin until the inner white part of the root appears. Expect a good amount of trim loss due to the uneven surface of the root. Like a potato, peeled celery root turns brown, so drop it in a bowl of cold water or wait to peel until just before you need it.

Broiling: door open or closed?

Like many of you, I learned how to use a stove from my mother, and she taught me to broil with the oven door open. But times change, and so do appliances. If your oven is less than ten years old, chances are you should be broiling with the door closed. Most ovens sold today are built as closed-door broilers, for reasons of safety and smoke control. We learned this the hard way in the test kitchen when one of our ovens shut down after we broiled with the door open, and we had to call in a technician to reset the electronic controls. To find out if your oven is a closed- or an open-door broiler, consult your manual or call the manufacturer. If your broiler is gas-powered, you should always broil with the door closed.

Pepper: beyond basic black

Pepper is the ever-present seasoning for savory foods, providing a pungent punch of flavor to everything it touches. Black, white, and green peppercorns are the dried berries of the *Piper nigrum*

BLACK PEPPERCORNS

come in many varieties with varying degrees of heat and flavor complexity. The largest black peppercorn is the Tellicherry, considered to be the best because it's left on the vine longer for more developed flavor. Other black peppercorns are Sarawak, Malabar, and Vietnamese, but unless you're buying from a specialty spice store, the packaging usually doesn't specify the origin.

plant. ("Pink peppercorns" are in a class of their own; see below). Each peppercorn has its own flavor characteristics and thus its own special uses in the kitchen.

Try to buy peppercorns from a source with

good turnover, store them away from heat and light (like any spice), and use them within a year. For mail-order sources, see Where to Buy It, p. 84.

—M. D.

WHITE PEPPERCORNS

are from the same berries as black pepper, but they're vine-ripened longer, and the black shell is stripped before drying. Their flavor is sharp, floral, almost winy, and hotter than black pepper. High heat coaxes out the flavor of white pepper, making it a good choice for grilled meats. Some cooks prefer white pepper in pale foods, such as white sauce or mashed potatoes, because it blends in.

GREEN PEPPERCORNS

are young berries that are mildly tart and full of heat but lacking in complexity. Pair green peppercorns with lighter foods, such as vegetables, chicken, and fish. You'll also find green peppercorns packed in jars of brine; use these whole or chopped in sauces, salad dressings, potato salads, pastas, and spreads.

PINK PEPPERCORNS

aren't actually peppercorns; they're the berries of an unrelated tree. Mildly sweet and aromatic, they don't contribute a lot of flavor. They're often added to pepper-corn blends for color. Pink peppercorns should only be used in pepper mills as part of a blend because their soft interiors could clog the mill's grinding mechanism if ground solo.



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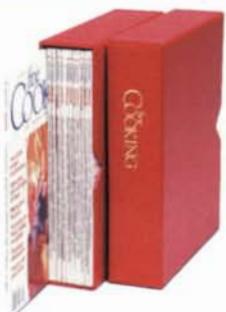
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Tomato Ketchup

Ketchup may be the iconic American condiment, but apparently we all have our own ideas about how it should taste. When ten *Fine Cooking* staffers participated in a blind tasting of seven nationally available ketchups, we assumed we'd find out which brand was best to use. We tasted the ketchups straight and on french fries, and there wasn't a clear winner that blew us all away. Instead, there was a three-way tie for first. And the runners-up (also tied) came in right on the heels of the winners. Our conclusion: The ideal ketchup is a strongly personal matter. Read on to find out which brand might suit your taste. (*Prices may vary.*)

—Kimberly Y. Masibay, associate editor

Runners-up



HEINZ

(\$1.49 for 24 ounces)

What this ketchup lacks in tomato flavor it more than makes up for in zip. The orange-red color seems a bit washed out, but Heinz's thick texture and spicy, vinegary kick drew raves from our panelists.

MUIR GLEN

(\$3.69 for 24 ounces)

This has a burgundy-red color and tomato-pasty texture. The flavor is good, if somewhat unusual—very acidic with notes of cloves and baking spices and roasted-tomato undertones—but it works out when eaten on fries.

Top Picks



HEINZ ORGANIC

(\$1.69 for 15 ounces)

Sweet tomato flavor, tingly acidity, saltiness, and spiciness all hang in near perfect balance. This ketchup is "a little feistier" than the others, which helped it score well with our tasters. Its burnished red color is appealing and the thick texture is perfect for fries.

HUNT'S

(\$1.39 for 24 ounces)

Smooth, glossy, and red as a hot-house tomato, this ketchup isn't especially thick but it clings well to french fries. It's on the sweet side but finishes with a nice little acidic kick. "A safe bet for anything from cocktail sauce to hot dogs."

DEL MONTE

(\$1.69 for 24 ounces)

This ketchup has a deep red color and a silky sheen. If you're looking for lots of sweet stewed-tomato flavor, Del Monte might be for you. It has the purest tomato flavor of the bunch and isn't as acidic or as spicy as Heinz or Hunt's.

Not recommended

ANNIE'S

(\$2.89 for 24 ounces)

Our panelists found this ketchup too grainy, too sweet, too vinegary, and not very tomatoey. The texture is nice and clingy, though, so in a pinch we might eat it on fries.

WESTBRAE NATURAL

(\$2.49 for 24 ounces)

Pulpy, sweet, and bland, this dark-red ketchup doesn't deliver the zip and zing we expect from ketchup. It has the thickness of tomato paste but not the depth of flavor.

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where to buy it

FROM THE BACK COVER
For more information on Thomas Haas's fresh fruit gelées, visit Thomashaas.com or call 604-904-7479.

Holiday Menu, p. 44

Wide pastry brushes with soft bristles are great for brushing phyllo layers. They're available in most kitchenware stores. To order by mail, contact Sweet Celebrations (Sweetc.com; 800-328-6722), which carries a 2-inch professional pastry brush for \$9.59.

Good-quality chocolate for the chocolate mousse is available in specialty stores and high-end supermarkets. For an online source, try Chocosphere.com (877-992-4626).

Shrimp Cocktail, p. 50

To make the pan-seared version of Lori Trovato's shrimp cocktail, we like to use Le Creuset, Staub, or Lodge brand grill pans. They're all carried by Sur La Table (Surlatable.com; 800-243-0852), where prices start at \$23.95.

Elegant Winter Salads, p. 52

Maria Helm Sinskey recommends using top-quality blue cheeses like Maytag or Point Reyes Original. You can buy these and other excellent blues at specialty shops, or order from Murrayscheese.com (888-692-4339).

Stuffed Chicken Breasts, p. 60

For turning stuffed chicken breasts, try a slotted spatula; it's less likely to damage the chicken's crust than tongs. Professional Cutlery Direct (cutlery.com; 800-859-6994) has a range of slotted spatulas, starting at \$19.99.

Baked Pasta, p. 68

In general, 9x13-inch baking dishes are best for Tony Rosenfeld's baked pastas. These are widely available in kitchenware stores and supermarkets. Note that the recipe will vary in volume depending on the ingre-

dients you choose. Although the Emile Henry dish pictured on p. 68 is slightly smaller than 9x13 inches, it worked because we made a simple version with just sauce, pasta, and cheese. The baking dish is available at Cookingenthusiast.com (800-859-6994) for \$34.99.

Japanese breadcrumbs, called panko, are an excellent substitute for homemade breadcrumbs. They're sold in Asian markets, or try Orientalpantry.com (978-264-4576), where 12 ounces is \$2.19.

Trifle, p. 57

To display the layers of the Black Forest trifle, a clear trifle bowl is best. The one pictured on p. 57 is \$24.95 at Crateandbarrel.com (800-967-6696).

In Season, p. 18

Kitchenware stores stock citrus zesters, rasp-style graters, and channel knives. A good online source is A Cook's Wares (800-915-9788; cookswares.com).

From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74

To be sure you always have enough on hand, buy peppercorns in larger quantities. Penzeys.com (800-741-7787) sells 4-, 8-, and 16-ounce bags of good-quality peppercorns in several varieties.

The Zyliss Easy Spin salad spinner is available at Cooking.com (800-663-8810); the 6-cup spinner sells for \$24.95.

Photos: top left, Amy Albert; all others, Scott Phillips

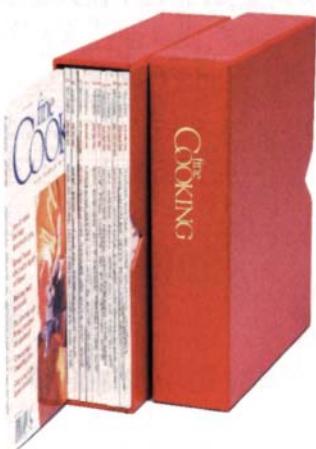
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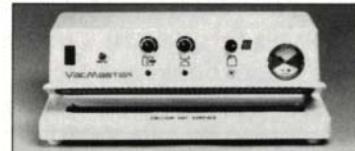
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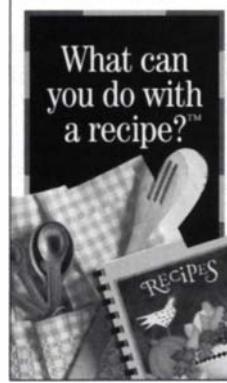
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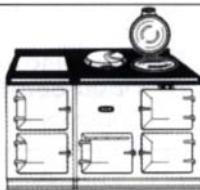
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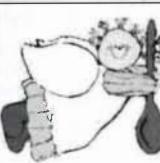
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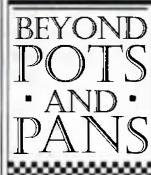
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nutrition information

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(analysis per serving)		total	from fat	(g)	(g)	total	sat	mono	poly	(mg)	(mg)	(g)
Letters	10											
Slow-Sautéed Broccoli with Parmesan		260	200	8	11	22	4	15	2	5	330	6
In Season	18											
Fresh Oranges with Caramel & Ginger		110	0	1	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Holiday Menu	44											
Tomato Soup with Orange & Cumin		160	70	4	20	8	5	2	1	20	1560	4
Baby Spinach with Scallions & Lemon Zest		140	60	5	21	7	1	5	1	0	590	9
Individual Beef Croutades with Boursin & Mushrooms		950	570	45	45	64	35	23	4	220	1180	2
Chocolate Mousse		670	510	7	36	57	40	14	3	285	80	4
Shrimp Cocktail	50											
Warm Seared Shrimp Cocktail		160	40	27	0	5	1	3	1	250	580	0
Lemon-Poached Shrimp Cocktail		140	10	18	2	1.0	0	0	0.5	170	590	0
Garlic-Roasted Shrimp Cocktail		130	50	18	0	6	1	4	1	170	390	0
Cocktail Sauce with Red Onion & Jalapeño		60	0	1	16	0	0	0	0	0	1140	1
Winter Salads	52											
Arugula with Blood Oranges, Fennel & Ricotta Salata		160	80	5	18	8	4	3	0	15	310	4
Escarole w/Green Apple, Celery Root, Pecans & Blue Cheese		210	160	5	9	18	6	10	2	15	540	3
Winter Greens w/ Black Olive Vinaigrette & Goat Cheese Croutons		330	230	11	15	26	9	15	2	30	650	7
Black Olive Vinaigrette		90	80	1	1	8	1	6	1	5	100	0
Black Forest Trifle	57											
Black Forest Trifle		400	240	4	40	26	16	6	4	105	120	2
Stuffed Chicken Breasts	60											
Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Prosciutto & Fontina		670	310	61	26	34	8	18	7	265	1220	1
Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Antipasto Filling		740	360	63	28	40	13	21	6	280	1140	2
Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Chiles & Jack Cheese		800	410	63	31	46	13	25	6	275	1260	3
Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Spinach & Goat Cheese Filling		760	360	60	34	41	11	23	6	250	1170	2
Sautéed Mushrooms	64											
Mushroom Sauté		130	110	2	5	12	6	5	1	25	300	0
Mushroom-Fontina Tart		110	80	4	5	9	4	4	1	45	230	0
Mushroom & Potato Gratin		250	140	6	23	16	9	5	1	50	750	2
Pasta with Mushrooms, Peas, Prosciutto & Sour Cream		620	230	27	70	25	12	9	3	85	1800	4
Baked Pasta	68											
Baked Penne with Tomato, Rosemary & Three Cheeses		400	110	22	49	12	7	4	1	35	1000	4
Baked Rigatoni with Cauliflower in a Spicy Pink Sauce		490	190	23	50	21	12	6	2	65	1040	4
Baked Rotini with Chicken, Asparagus & Sun-Dried Tomatoes		560	250	31	46	28	13	8	6	95	940	3
Baked Orecchiette with Sausage, Spinach & Thyme		700	390	30	47	43	22	15	5	120	1350	3
Baked Ziti with Peas & Browned Onions		550	240	24	55	27	16	6	4	75	1010	5
From Our Test Kitchen	74											
Ory-Aged Beef Rib Roast w/a Mustard, Garlic & Thyme Crust		370	190	41	1	21	9	10	1	120	1900	0
Horseradish-Chive Crème Fraîche		40	20	1	1	3	2	1	0	10	320	0
Quick & Delicious	90c											
Chicken Satés with Spicy Peanut Sauce		60	30	5	1	3.5	1.0	1.5	1.0	10	190	0
Cucumber Rounds with Hummus & Yogurt		25	15	1	2	1.5	0	1.0	0.5	0	60	1
Smoked Salmon Rolls		40	25	3	1	3.0	1.5	1.0	0.5	10	310	0
Apple, Blue Cheese & Hazelnut Salad on Endive Leaves		30	20	1	1	2.5	1.0	1.0	0.5	<5	125	0
Seared Tuna with Tropical Salsa		25	10	1	3	1.0	0	1.0	0	<5	150	0
Bacon-Wrapped Ginger Soy Scallops		80	60	2	2	7	2	3	1	10	310	0
Roasted Potato Slices with Romesco Sauce		20	15	0	1	1.5	0	1.0	0	0	65	0

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of Del Mar, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the

calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the

quantity of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and 1/8 teaspoon salt and 1/16 teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.

*a feast for
the holidays*



an easy meal for any day

Fresh Australian Lamb makes a delicious holiday highlight. It's also easy and quick to prepare for everyday meals. Flavorful chops, shanks or legs are perfect for roasting, grilling or braising in minutes. And because Australian Lamb grazes on lush, green pastures, it's mild, lean and rich in nutrients—ideal for everyone at your table, any time of the year.

Sage and Mint Australian Lamb Chops on Pea Mash

SERVES 4 • PREP AND COOK IN 25 MINUTES

8 Australian lamb loin chops
2 tbs olive oil (divided)
2 tbs fresh chopped sage
Salt and freshly ground pepper
2 potatoes, peeled and chopped
2 cups peas
1/4 cup buttermilk or milk
1/4 cup white wine
1 tbs white wine vinegar
8-10 mint leaves, torn

1. Brush the chops lightly with half of the olive oil. Rub the sage, salt and pepper into the surface and set aside.

2. Boil potatoes in salted water until nearly cooked. Add the peas to the potatoes and cook 1-2 minutes. Drain, mash well, folding in enough milk to achieve desired consistency. Season with salt and pepper and keep warm.

3. Heat the remaining oil in a large non-stick pan over medium heat. Cook lamb chops for 3 minutes on each side. Drain fat from pan. Add wine, vinegar and mint. Cover and cook for 1-2 minutes, turning chops once. (Lamb is most tender when cooked medium rare, 135-140°F internal temperature.) Serve chops on the mash with pan juices spooned over.

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READER SERVICE NO. 109



Australian Lamb
Fresh, Easy and Delicious.

Gumdrops for Grownups

The *pâtes de fruit*—or fruit gelées—that Thomas Haas crafts in his tiny pastry kitchen in North Vancouver may measure just a scant inch square, but they pack a big burst of bright flavor. Smooth, sweet, tangy, and intense, they're far from your average gumdrop.

The recipe is a simple one—fruit, sugar, acid, and apple pectin—and depends on a delicate balance: just enough sugar so the fruit flavor shines, and just enough pectin so the candy sets without a gummy mouthfeel. Thomas uses only fruit at peak ripeness; passionfruit, black currant, and lychee are current favorites. "You can't make gelées from just any fruit," he says. "There has to be enough body and flavor to cut the sugar and stand up to cooking. Kiwi becomes too sweet, and melon isn't intense enough. Banana works really well."

The fruit mixture boils just long enough for maximum water evaporation, which requires exacting vigilance—a quality common to the best pastry chefs. Thomas insists on testing doneness by feel, and then he uses both a thermometer and a refractometer to check moisture and sugar level. "Judging by feel is important," he admits, "but the tool and the eye have to go hand in hand."

—Amy Albert, senior editor



1. Thomas strains passionfruit purée as he pours it into a shallow mold.
2. The purée sets up into a gelée within seconds, so Thomas works quickly to smooth and level the surface with an offset spatula.
3. For the cleanest edge and best-looking pieces, the gelées are sliced with a candy cutter known as a harp.
4. Just before packing, the gelées are tossed by hand in sugar to coat them, preserve them, and make them look as sparkly as they taste.

quick & delicious

BY LAURA WERLIN

Easy hors d'oeuvres are essential

for holiday entertaining, and there's nothing more helpful than having a few quick "go-to" recipes in your repertoire. As you'll see, none of these recipes calls for bread—it makes hors d'oeuvres too filling, and with the usual heavy holiday eating at this time of year, I like to offer lighter starters. Best of all, parts of all these recipes can be made in advance. Marinated chicken? Prepare it the day before.

Hummus? Ditto. Still, if you decide to make these recipes at the last minute, that's fine too, since they take almost no time at all. Don't forget, the holidays are for everyone to enjoy—including the cook.



Chicken Satés with Spicy Peanut Sauce

Yields about 2 dozen hors d'oeuvres.

2 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 1 lb.)
2 Tbs. soy sauce
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
1 Tbs. vegetable oil
2 medium cloves garlic, minced
½ tsp. curry powder
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
⅓ cup crunchy natural peanut butter
⅓ cup unsweetened coconut milk
1 tsp. light brown sugar
Pinch cayenne
About 32 bamboo skewers, soaked in water for at least 20 minutes

Remove the chicken tenders, if still attached, and trim any excess fat from the chicken breasts. With a sharp knife, cut the breasts lengthwise into ½-inch slices (you should have about six slices per breast). Cut each slice in half crosswise to make about 32 pieces total. If you have tenders, cut those in half, too.

Combine 1 Tbs. of the soy sauce and 1 Tbs. of the lemon juice with the oil, garlic, curry powder, ½ tsp. salt, and a few grinds of pepper in a medium bowl. Add the

chicken and toss well to coat. Let the chicken marinate at room temperature for least 15 minutes and up to 1 hour.

Meanwhile, combine the remaining 1 Tbs. soy sauce and 1 Tbs. lemon juice with the peanut butter, coconut milk, brown sugar, cayenne, and ⅛ tsp. salt in a small saucepan.

Position an oven rack as close to the broiler as possible and heat the broiler to high. Thread one chicken piece onto the end of each skewer. Set the skewered chicken on a broiler pan and broil, turning the skewers once halfway through, until the chicken is lightly browned and cooked through, about 7 minutes total. While the chicken cooks, warm the sauce gently over medium-low or low heat. If the sauce seems very thick, thin it with about 1 Tbs. water. Let the chicken cool slightly and then serve the satés with the peanut sauce for dipping.

Tip: You can marinate the chicken, refrigerated, for up to 24 hours.



Cucumber Rounds with Hummus & Yogurt

**Yields about
40 hors d'oeuvres.**

- 15-oz. can chickpeas, rinsed and drained**
- 1 large clove garlic, coarsely chopped**
- 3 Tbs. fresh lemon juice**
- 3 Tbs. tahini (mixed well before measuring)**
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 tsp. ground cumin**
- Kosher or sea salt**
- 1 large seedless cucumber**
- 1/4 cup plain yogurt, well stirred**
- 2 Tbs. sesame seeds, toasted until golden brown**

Put the chickpeas, garlic, lemon juice, tahini, olive oil, cumin, 1/4 tsp. salt, and 2 Tbs. water in a food processor. Process until the mixture is smooth, about 2 minutes.

Use a vegetable peeler to peel the cucumber skin lengthwise at 1/4-inch intervals to create a striped pattern. Slice the cucumber crosswise into 1/4-inch rounds and set them on a platter.

To assemble, lightly salt the cucumber rounds. Top

each round with a generous teaspoon of hummus, and top the hummus with a small dollop of the yogurt. Sprinkle with sesame seeds.

Tip: You can make the hummus up to four days ahead; just refrigerate it in an airtight container. Bring the hummus to room temperature before using.



Smoked Salmon Rolls

Yields 18 hors d'oeuvres.

- 1/4 lb. cream cheese, at room temperature**
- 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice**
- 1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest**
- 2 Tbs. plus 2 tsp. thinly sliced fresh chives**
- Kosher salt**
- 3/4 cup shaved fresh fennel (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74)**
- 8 oz. thinly sliced smoked salmon (not hot-smoked)**
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped fennel fronds**

In a small bowl, mix the cream cheese, lemon juice, zest, chives, and 1/8 tsp. salt.

To assemble, lay an 8- or 9-inch-long sheet of plastic wrap on the counter. Slightly overlap slices of salmon on the plastic to create a rectangle measuring about 3 1/2x7 inches. The long side of the rectangle should be parallel to the edge of your work surface. Cover with another sheet of plastic and press gently with your hands or a flat spatula to encourage the salmon to stick together. Remove the top sheet of plastic. Using a thin metal offset spatula or a butter knife, spread about 2 Tbs. of the cream cheese mixture on the salmon, leaving a 1/2-inch border along the long

sides. Arrange about a third of the fennel shavings lengthwise on the lower half of the salmon. Sprinkle the fennel lightly with salt. Starting at the long side closest to you and using the plastic wrap as an aid, gently roll up the salmon to enclose the filling. Gently press the roll together at the seams. Transfer the roll to a cutting board. Cut the roll into 6 pieces. Repeat with the remaining salmon, cream cheese mixture, and fennel to make 2 more rolls. You may have extra salmon or fennel.

Arrange the rolls on a platter, cut side up. Garnish with the chopped fennel fronds.

Tip: You can mix the cream cheese up to one day ahead and refrigerate it in an airtight container. Bring it to room temperature before using. The rolls can be assembled, covered, and refrigerated up to 4 hours ahead. Let stand at room temperature for about 15 minutes before serving.



Apple, Blue Cheese & Hazelnut Salad on Endive Leaves

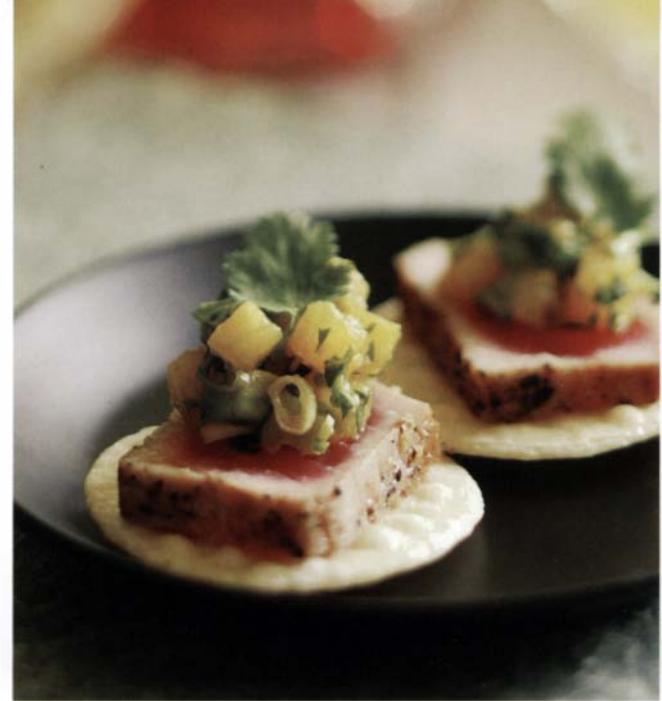
Yields 35 to 40
hors d'oeuvres.

1 large (about 8 oz.) tart-sweet red apple, such as Gala or Braeburn, cored and cut into $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch dice
3 oz. blue cheese, crumbled (to yield about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup finely chopped celery (from about 2 large ribs)
3 Tbs. mayonnaise
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
Kosher salt
5 Belgian endives, leaves separated; smallest leaves saved for another use
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup hazelnuts, toasted and coarsely chopped

In a medium bowl, combine the apple, blue cheese, celery, mayonnaise, and lemon juice. Stir gently to combine. Season to taste with salt.

To assemble, mound a small spoonful of the apple mixture onto the core end of each endive leaf. Sprinkle with the hazelnuts and serve.

Tip: To bring this hors d'oeuvre to a party, pack the apple mixture, the endive, and the hazelnuts separately and quickly assemble them once you arrive (don't make the apple mixture more than an hour ahead). Also, you can toast and chop the hazelnuts for up to one month in advance and freeze them in an airtight container.



Seared Tuna with Tropical Salsa

Yields about 48
hors d'oeuvres.

8 to 9 oz. fresh tuna fillet
1 Tbs. vegetable or olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup finely diced fresh pineapple
4 scallions (white and light green parts only), thinly sliced
2½ Tbs. fresh lime juice
1½ Tbs. soy sauce
1 tsp. minced fresh ginger
1 small ripe avocado (about 6 oz.), finely diced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro leaves; plus small whole leaves for garnish
3½-oz. package plain rice crackers

Cut the tuna into long, fat, squared-off strips or "logs" 1 to 1½ inches thick. Coat the tuna with the oil and season lightly with salt and pepper. Set a 10-inch heavy-duty skillet over high heat. When the pan is very hot, after 2 to 3 minutes, sear the tuna logs for 20 to 30 seconds on each side—they should be seared

outside and rare inside. Transfer to a clean cutting board and slice ¼ inch thick.

In a medium bowl, combine the pineapple, scallions, lime juice, soy sauce, and ginger. Add the avocado and gently stir to combine. Stir in the chopped cilantro.

To assemble, set the tuna slices on rice crackers; top each with a small spoonful of the salsa and a whole cilantro leaf. You may have extra crackers and salsa.



Bacon-Wrapped Ginger Soy Scallops

*Yields 2 dozen
hors d'oeuvres.*

**1/4 cup soy sauce
1 Tbs. dark brown sugar
1 1/2 tsp. minced fresh ginger
6 very large "dry" sea
scallops (8 to 10 oz. total)
8-oz. can sliced water
chestnuts, drained
12 slices bacon, cut in half
crosswise**

Set a rack in the upper third of the oven. Line the bottom of a broiler pan with foil, replace the perforated top part of the pan, and put the whole pan on the oven rack. Heat the oven to 450°F.

In a medium bowl, combine the soy sauce, brown sugar, and ginger. If the muscle tabs from the sides of the scallops are still attached, peel them off and discard them. Cut each scallop into quarters. Marinate the scallop pieces in the soy mixture for 15 minutes. Reserve the marinade.

To assemble, stack 2 slices of water chestnut in the center of a piece of the bacon. Put a piece of scallop on top of the water chestnuts. Wrap each end of the bacon over the scallop and secure

with a toothpick. Repeat with the remaining bacon, water chestnuts, and scallops (you may not use all of the water chestnuts).

Remove the broiler pan from the oven and quickly arrange the bacon-wrapped scallops on the hot pan so that an exposed side of each scallop faces up. Drizzle the scallops with the reserved marinade. Bake, turning the scallops over once after 10 minutes, until the bacon is browned around the edges and the scallops are cooked through, about 15 minutes total.

Tip: Ask for "dry" sea scallops—they haven't been treated with a solution to maintain their shelf life, so they brown better, have a nicer texture and flavor, and tend to taste fresher than treated or "wet" scallops.



Roasted Potato Slices with Romesco Sauce

*Yields about 48 hors
d'oeuvres.*

**1 medium plum tomato
(about 1/4 lb.), cored and
quartered
16 whole almonds, toasted
1 Tbs. coarsely chopped
jarred roasted red pepper
2 small cloves garlic
1/8 tsp. cayenne
Kosher salt and freshly
ground black pepper
1 Tbs. red-wine vinegar
4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
3/4 lb. small red potatoes
(1 to 2 inches in diameter),
rinsed and dried
Finely grated zest of
2 medium lemons
1/4 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley
leaves**

Set a rack in the top third of the oven; heat the oven to 450°F.

Put the tomato, almonds, roasted red pepper, garlic, cayenne, 1/4 tsp. salt, and a few grinds of black pepper in a food processor. Process, scraping the bowl as needed, until the mixture is somewhat smooth, about 1 minute. Add the vinegar and 1 Tbs. of the olive oil and process until well incorporated. Taste and add more salt if needed.

Trim the ends off of each potato and cut the potatoes crosswise into 1/8- to 1/4-inch slices. In a bowl, toss the potatoes with the remaining 3 Tbs. olive oil and 1 tsp. salt to coat well. Lay the slices in a single layer on a baking sheet. Roast the potatoes, turning the slices with a spatula and rotating the baking sheet halfway through roasting, until golden brown, 20 to 30 minutes. Let the potatoes cool slightly.

To serve, arrange the potato slices on a serving platter; blot with a paper towel if they look oily. Top each slice with a generous 1/4 tsp. of the romesco sauce (you may not use all the sauce). Garnish each hors d'oeuvre with a tiny pinch of lemon zest and a parsley leaf.

Tip: The sauce can be made up to three days ahead and refrigerated. Before using, bring it to room temperature and stir well.

Laura Werlin is the author of Great Grilled Cheese: 50 Innovative Recipes for Stovetop, Grill, and Sandwich Maker. ♦